



Vol. 1.

The Lane.

# IN THE SILVER AGE:

“Essays—

“THAT IS, DISPERSED MEDITATIONS.”

BY

HOLME LEE,

AUTHOR OF “MAUDE TALBOT,” “SYLVAN HOLT’S DAUGHTER,”  
“KATHIE BRANDE,” ETC.

“When any one says to me, I think so and so,—I like to say to them, When did you think it, where did you think it, how did you think it, and to whom did you talk about it?”—*Commonplace Philosopher*.

IN TWO VOLS.

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TO  
MY DEAR SISTER FRANCES,  
IN REMEMBRANCE  
OF  
SEPTEMBER 12, 1863.





## PREFACE.

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### HOW THIS BOOK CAME TO BE WRITTEN.

**N**EITHER altogether by accident nor altogether by design. In a desultory, lingering, aimless way. In bits and scraps and odd chapters, as circumstances suggested and the thoughts arose. Who has not advisers—fond, anxious, and faithful? Who that writes novels has not been bidden to write something else—not *better* but *more good*? For several years past I have lain under this gentle pressure, and between the covers of this Book are the results—the philosophy of a working-woman's life. Perhaps there are people leading similar quiet lives in the world to whom these rambles, recollections, and fancies of my leisure may be not unwelcome.





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# ROUND ABOUT HOME IN THE SPRING-TIME.

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“ Who doth ambition shun,  
And loves to live i' the sun,  
Come hither, come hither, come hither.”  
*As You Like It.*

VOL. I

A





## I.

### THROUGH THE WOODS.

**M**ORNING by morning, all through the bitter winter weather, a trim little Robin Redbreast has sung at my window a plaintive song—his the one sweet note in the frozen silence. When the snow lay deep upon the lawn, there was always, just outside the glass, a clear space under the veranda where it had melted; and as soon as I looked out to con the promise of the day in the sky, my feathered pensioner came fluttering from some adjacent bush, and alighted on the pebbles, where his daily dole of crumbs was as carefully strewn for him by my old housekeeper as my own meal was spread for me.

We breakfasted together,—Robin outside the window, I within,—chatting meanwhile about all sorts of trifles in which we take a mutual interest. When in his most familiar, conversational mood,

he would lean his head sagaciously on one side, and peering up at me, with tiny inquisitive bright eye, between each crumb he pecked, would trill me pretty stories in the pleasantest, friendliest way you can imagine. One bleak sunless morning, I remember, he chirped me a sorrowful legend of the woods, where the scarlet holly-berries had just been rifled by thousands of thousands to decorate warm holiday Christmas homes ; though God, he said, had given them to the birds for subsistence during the long, long frosts when the earth lies dead under her white winter winding-sheet.

This little tale touched me with compunction ; for there, over my own chimney, hung glossy, ripe-clustered branches, rich with a week's provision for a whole family of robins. I listened to him, and regarded my holly wistfully. I could not bear to part with it. To every berry hung a thought ; amongst the spiny leaves half a life-time of sweet, sad memories were entangled—memories of happy Christmases, prayed over and slipped down the bead-roll of time years and years ago ; of Yule logs that blazed up and blazed out on hearths that are cold now, and heaped with wan ashes that shall never more be rekindled ; of voices that have

sung their last song, and whisper to me only in such echoes as may thrill to us from the silent land ; of eyes that have shed their last tears, and are shining peacefully in the light of heaven ; of hearts that have throbbed their last pang, and are at rest from all anguish and all troubling for ever. No ; I must keep my Yule garland ! “ Spare it to me, Robin, and I will spare thee crumbs enough to feed fat a colony ! ” said I ; but on opening the window to make good my promise, the noise startled him, and away he flew.

On New-year’s morning Robin’s note had a chorus. The missel-thrush was uttering her warning of tempest in a loud, long cry from the topmost boughs of one of the old elms ; and before the day was done I saw the white horses trampling over the sea, and heard the grand triumph-song of their riders, the stormy winds, as they crashed upon the strand, and rode down the feeble wrecks, which strewed the beach for many and many a day after that wild cavalry had returned, tame and gracious, to the hand of the Almighty Leader, at whose voice they had arisen and gone forth. I fancied Robin’s note was sadder for ever so long after the great gale. Had he flown to some

other familiar window and found it dark, the children still, the lonely mother weeping for her dead?

But by and by his cheerfulness revived, and he gossiped of Jenny-Wren, whose humble mind had always found something to rejoice in during the dreariest days, when the snow was drifting down from a livid sky, and icicles were hanging to the eaves. I had heard her in the garden in the coldest weather; but now it was March, and Robin had seen her beginning to build her nest low down upon one of the gray-green mossy elms, where presently the primrose would spread its broad leaves to hide it, like the wren's nest of Wordsworth's poem:—

“High on the trunk's projecting bough,  
And fix'd, an infant's span above  
The budding flowers, peep'd forth the nest,  
The prettiest of the grove.

“A primrose for a veil had spread  
The largest of her upright leaves;  
And thus, for purposes benign,  
A simple flower deceives.”

The sun was shining that morning, but the wind was keen; and when my little friend would have beguiled me out into the woods, or over the breezy

downs, I lazily turned to my warm fireside, and snatched up a favourite book, "Not, yet, Robin; not yet. When Spring comes, then will I follow thee," said I. And the east wind whistled through the keyhole of the door that Spring was on his way, and would soon be here.

I had a genuine welcome for him to-day when he arrived; and Robin, in the joy of his heart, poured forth to the sunshine a merrier song than I had ever yet heard him sing. "It is April, April, April!" trilled he; "let all the earth be glad, be glad, be glad!" And after he had proclaimed the good tidings, he fluttered his little wings, and flew over the garden into the lane, whither I followed him, musing pleasantly as I went. He has his own warm nest of leaves and moss, of hair and grass, in some sheltered cranny of the great tree-roots that grow in the hedgerow; but he betook himself to it in so much haste that I lost sight of him, and when I entered on the lane I saw him no more. Nevertheless, I had no lack of company in my ramble round home this first beautiful morning of Spring-time.

Nearly a month ago I gathered the last stem



of coltsfoot in the lane. Since early December it had been in blossom, perfuming the winter's frost and cold with fragrant memories of summer. Nutty odour of heliotrope, mellow sweetness of apricot ripening on sunny, south orchard-wall, moist balm of golden gorse upon wide-lying moors, were all wafted abroad from the steep hedgerow, where the pale, modest flowers lifted their heads amidst trailing fetters of bramble and long, withered spears of grass. Now the bank rises in one green bed of leaves, lapping, scale-like, over and under each other in all the brilliant freshness of a showery, gleamy April. The narrow runnel at the foot of the bank trickles in and out amongst the fine pebbles, dimpling and sparkling until it loses itself in a sandy level, thirsty enough to drink up streams far more copious than this tiny glance of water which peeps up at me with quaint familiar ken, and sinks lispingly as it goes by of bonny becks that I know up in the north country, full and flowing, swift and free, racing down every hill-side and through every glen, since the tricky elves of ice and frost have loosed them from their bonds and Spring has strewn their banks with daisies.

A pied wagtail runs before me all the way to the corner of the lane, where is a leafless willow more than half decayed, at whose foot the slender brook purls an inarticulate rhyme, and the lustrous primroses have made a sweet sunshine of their own. Has the pretty, familiar creature built its nest in some crevice of the trunk, and will my pertinacious enemy, the Cuckoo, by and by turn out its tender family from that secluded dwelling to make way for his own lustier progeny?

I do not love the Cuckoo. It may once have been a mere sentiment carelessly sown in my childish mind; but it has grown and strengthened since until it has become a mature prejudice with deep-struck roots, which I would not eradicate even if I could. From the moment that I hear his first note, having no lucky coin to turn in my purse, until the early summer days, when his tedious call rings in my ears from morning until night, announcing the welcome intelligence that go he must, my heart never softens towards him. He is a cheerful bird, some persons say; he is a monotonous bird, say I, and a selfish tyrant and usurper to boot; and all selfish tyrants and usurpers I hate—whether they oust callow fledglings from a nest of moss and

hair, or gag the liberty of nations, and crown themselves imperial by virtue of might against right.

At this corner, the lane narrows considerably, and becomes little better than a bridle-track, with high hedges on either hand, which quite exclude the distant prospect. No matter; rich are the banks with homely flowers; celandine and wild strawberry-bloom, ground-ivy and clustered violets; tall pale cuckoo-flowers, broad glossy leaves of arum, and delicate fronds of fern, uncurling their spring-green, while the last year's growth fades into sear beneath them. The may-thorn is in its vernal freshness, not yet full foliaged, but over it the honeysuckle has woven a knotted net of branches, sprouting everywhere into soft downy leaves of a gray-purplish green. The pathway lies all in shadow, but the primrose sunshine makes it bright, and shews the dark sprays of veined ivy trailing down from the old hedges, and rooting themselves in amongst the dainty flowers.

Coming to a gate on the left-hand side of the lane, I pause indecisive. Shall I follow the track across this undulating marshy pasture to the beautiful woods, whose tasselled lady-larches and heavy black giant pines I see in the blue distance? or

shall I follow the further course of the lane, which will lead me to the brow of yon furze-clad hill, whence I might behold a lovely prospect this glorious April-day? But I remember that the wind blows always in Spring keen and sharp upon that hill; and for the moment it lies under the shadow of a cloud, while the woods shimmer dimly through a mist of sunshine. That decides me. Minute philosophy delights in pleasantness, and acknowledges no guides but whim and fancy. I open the gate, therefore, and passing through into the marshy field, green as emerald, meet so many fresh breezes that I am fain to draw my old cloak about me, and for a little while even to regret the humble shelter of the lane. For lazy meditation, I love the quiet dreaminess of unbroken calm; but as the cool zephyrs blowing from the downs assail me, I lift my head, my heart expands; I look up to the blue heavens—all the lovelier for flying columns of cloud—and a sense of thankfulness for infinite goodness and beauty fills my soul.

If there be romance in Gipsydom, now is its prime. I like to believe that the wandering beggar suns himself to-day, and, though formulas of words are rare on his lips, unconsciously thanks

God for the gay Spring that gives him a fresh spur of strength, and throws a hue of pleasantness over the hard and barren way through the world which has been allotted him.

To me the sky would be no brighter, the air no more exhilarating, the wide-spread view no more varied or beautiful, if I possessed these rich acres instead of merely having liberty to roam through them. The love of Nature is a precious gift—an endowment inalienable, that we may have and hold with little worldly pelf. In her face is peace; on her bosom is rest. Have we a great grief? Let us carry it out to her, and she will bury it; rain gentle rain upon its grave, and hide it under springing flowers. Have we a sordid care? She will soothe its puny fret, and shew us how small it is, and how unworthy, by the thousand better things that are given us to enjoy. Are we poor? She smiles on us as warmly as on the wealthiest; living, she shuts out no beauty from our patient eyes; dying, she haps us as closely, folds us as tenderly, as if we came forth from a palace, and counted kin with the proudest of the world.

“A little earth for charity,” is our last need and her last dole. There lie we—all low, and all equal

even in men's sight. Perhaps in the eyes of angels there are no such wide distinctions amongst us now as it would seem, though some walk in rags and others go clad in purple; though some labour early, and late take rest, and others, like the lilies of the field, need neither toil nor spin.

From the fields I turn into a short, steep, winding defile, where I hear the babble of a rapid stream, that I cannot see from the depth of its channel, and the strong overgrowth of thorns and briars that has never challenged the pruning-knife for years. This is a bit of Nature's tangled wild-wood. The path might be a dry water-course, so uneven, stony, and encumbered is it. To the left, high above my head, lies the field-land that I have just quitted, where the ploughers are going to and fro, turning up the rich furrows that waved all golden in the harvest months. To the right rises a sandy cliff, variously tinted with colour, from the summit of which waves and hangs down the overflowing luxuriance of outlying portions of the beautiful woods that I saw from the gate in the lane.

This is the first scoop of the descent. At the

next bend, I come on a little vignette of human and humorous interest. Improving the precious moments of his freedom, a poor, ragged, gray donkey is cropping such scanty blades as he can get through the prickly frieze of brambles, while two little boys are standing disconsolate beside a sack of flour which has slipt from his back, and now lies sulkily prone upon the ground. At my appearance, the children make mighty efforts to heave it up, and partially succeed; but their weight and the weight of the load together are too much for the donkey; and as they press against his patient flank, he is shoved into the ditch, and the sack drops down again lumpishly upon the stones. The excellent beast scrambles out, and resumes his nibbling, and the children look at each other and at me, pathetically. They are not angry with themselves, nor with the donkey; they are only scared at the disaster. They have not attempted to lighten trouble by indulgence in play; they have no heart to play; and after each failure, they make a fresh attempt. Suppose I help them. By standing on the other broadside of the donkey, and catching at the mouth of the sack and pulling as they hoist, perhaps we shall get the philoso-

phical beast once more overloaded. I suggest this expedient, which is promptly accepted and put into execution in solemn silence. The boys gaze at me when it is done, but still they say nothing; and as I say nothing either, they start on their way again, looking soberly relieved, but mute as little men of stone.

Just before coming to the gate at the bottom of this deep-cut winding lane, a shallow stream flows across the road from the fields above, and pours down into the deep channel where the louder rivulet foams unseen. Then the country opens out somewhat, and I am in a wild ravine, which must have been forest once upon a time, from the gnarled roots left everywhere to the slow decay of nature. The ground slopes steeply from either side to a tortuous water-course—the main stream of the brook that rushes down by the narrow pass. Masses of primrose fleck the turf far and near; and delicate mosses—some flowered in tiny bells, some tipt blood-red, some strewn as with seed-pearls, some starred dark velvet green—shew themselves on the soft ground, on broken banks, and on long-rooted stones. The few trees that remain are all bearded with hoary lichen, loose and thread-like



on the crooked branches, and scaly-gray upon the rugged boles. The wind in winter draws as through a funnel down this weird glen when it blows from the blustering south-west; and the saplings have twisted themselves awry in cowering from its fury, until, like youth ill-spiced, they have taken such a perverse warp, that they can never succeed in growing straight again.

There are two roads, each mounting high on the opposite declivities, the summits of which are fringed with wood. The more distant is to be reached by a bridge of one stone arch, spanning the water-course, where the hart's-tongue fern hangs its broad glossy fronds down to the stream, and the graceful lady-fern waves feathery on the brink. Towards this bridge wend I leisurely; for there is no wind blowing here now, and the sun is as warm and genial as an advanced May-day. The ground shews black and oozy in patches, and a crumbling cliff of sandstone to the right rises too precipitously for any evasion of the treacherous intervals of morass. If I try the vivid green turf below the road, that is still worse. I therefore resolve to go straight on, drawing a philosophic parallel between these swampy spots on tracks

which usage has distinctly marked as the best the kind of country can afford, and those difficulties in life we had better go boldly through than attempt to skirt.

The road continues to ascend under this cliff, festooned with various ferns and trailing black briony, until it brings me to a level of fine firm grass, elastic and springy, with here and there a tuft of dark purple-green heather breaking through, and a thick clump of furze, which sheds all abroad a warm, mellow, rich perfume. Now I am on the verge of the woods. Before me there is a dusky, chequered gloom of spreading pines, of oaks, of ash, of slender birch, of holly, and hazel, and alder, budding and bursting into leaf, and wrought over with fantastic tracery by myriads of wild bramble sprays. Looking behind me, I see swelling downs, scarred with white chalk patches and dimpled into shady hollows—I see brown cornland, and green pasture, and broken glen, with the thread of water winding through, and pools gleaming from amidst tall reeds in the low marshy spots where the bittern utters his solitary cry.

The wood-path that I enter first begins at once to descend. Cushioned slopes of moss rise softly

above it, and amongst the russet ruins of last year's fernery, the spring is everywhere shaking loose the tresses that will crown the summer with wavy grace. April has shed some tears since she came in, and from every drop must have bloomed a violet, so richly is the moist turf strewn with the dainty purple buds. The frail white anemone ripples over every curve, and the blue hyacinth grows in all the lavish profusion of unstinting nature. Everywhere the woods seem like some sweet wilderness-garden, in whose shadiest spots the primroses have scattered their flowery lustre. Nothing is more beguiling to a minute philosopher than a walk through these woods in the Spring-time. At each step there is something new; in a span of ground there is study for a year. To-day every tree and bush and brake is musical with the song of birds; the merry carol of the thrush, the cheerful whistle of the merle, and the drone of lesser songsters unite and flow in one continuous harmony, of which no note could jar on the most sensitive ear.

Wandering forwards, I pass a group of secluded cottages, and then the road winds and curves up again; and where these beautiful ash-trees sweep

their long boughs down from the verge of a hollow cliff it leaves the shelter of the woods and crosses a furze-covered heath to a plantation where the pines and firs stand in even rank, and a broad, grassy glade, barred with sunshine, winds away temptingly into its seclusion. Minute philosophy resists no temptation of this character, but strays lazily onwards and onwards, pausing here and there for silent thought or reverent contemplation, until in the warm noon-day, sheltered cosily from all vagrant gusts of wind, it brings me to a spot where lies the dry trunk of a fallen tree. Very suggestive of rest it looks to a loiterer half-wearied, and forthwith I avail myself of it, and in the drowsiness of a pleasant fatigue gradually muse myself into Dreamland.

There the vistas of pines stretch out into long, dim avenues; the air grows softer and more balmy; the sky deepens into a softer blue, and I am away, far away in a strange country with the companions of my youth, making merry holiday in the woods.

I see them flitting shadowy to and fro; I hear their ringing voices amongst the trees, one calling to another through the distance and the lapse of

time, "Where are you?" *Where are you?* I wish I could behold them nearer; I wish they could sit down with me here in the flesh, and tell me how much has come true of all the fancy-wrought visions with which we gilded our future.

*Our Future!* Our *Past* now! Well, let it go, and a blessing go with it. It has not been so bright as we dreamed, nor so black as unwise Experience vainly warned us it might be. We shall not better it now; for the most hopeful of our to-morrows must have glided down the stream of yesterdays a long while ago. I speak for myself. I look back where I used to look forward; I see memories where I used to see visions. But those happy, familiar faces peer at me out of the mist again—still young, still kind, still unfretted and unchafed by the wear and tear of life, as I sit in the dreamland of the woods; and to their whispered "Where are you?" my heart echoes back an almost painful cry, "*Where are you?*" Somewhere in the wide world far apart, never again to meet perchance; or somewhere *out* of the world,—all its work and care, all its disappointments and sorrows done with for ever.

I know not whether it be so with others, but to

me the pleasant holidays of my youth recur much more vividly and much more often than its hard lessons or its solemn chastisements. There were gray days, I know, and dark days, but the streaks of sunshine are stronger in my memory; for which I thank God as for a good gift, akin to cheerfulness and serene content. Let the gloom fade always thus, and let the bright hours brighten to the end, keeping my spirit green while my head grows gray!

Round about this spot where I am resting there must have been a "pleasance" or garden, probably attached to the ancient manor house, now of fallen fortunes and serving humbly as a farmstead, the mossy roof and chimneys of which I can see rising lower in the wood towards the marsh-pastures. The laurels, the hollies, the rhododendrons grow almost to the height of trees, and the soft undulations of the ground betray where the walks wound in and out of the shrubberies.

Two or three generations of stately dames and formal gentlemen have jested and sauntered, lived, and loved, and died since their ancestor's lovely domain was given over to the careless husbandry of nature; but there is an air of romance about

it still, and less of sylvan simplicity than in the wild wood adjacent ; and to my mind there is a touch of pathos such as ever lingers about the places where the footsteps of men have been familiar but are so no longer.

If I were a ghost-seer it would be in scenes like this that I should desire to see my ghosts—not pallid spectres woefully revisiting the glimpses of the moon, but gay troops of knights and ladies, clanking in steel or rustling in brocade ; or stealthy pairs of lovers whispering in the twilight the enchanted story that is as old as the hills and as new as the rose that bloomed in the morning.

My way home lies through a fair, fertile valley, by open pastures richly green, by another manor house from which stretches an avenue of grotesque and ancient yews ; by newly-turned furrows of corn-land, by the village and the village-school, where the children, busier than I, are at work in a drowsy hum. And here I meet again my little silent men and their donkey bearing the sack of flour. We recognise each other, and the brighter of the two children smiles and nods ; the other still has his charge upon his mind, and dares not withdraw a single thought from it. But before I

turn into the lane, I am glad to see them come to a halt at the baker's shop-door, and to know that the anxiety of the solemn-faced infant is at an end.

When school looses will he join his small fellows in a game of play, or is he already too seriously plunged in the business of life to have any time or taste for play? I am afraid it may be so. And yet perhaps there is a holiday-world of which we have no ken for these children of the working-poor; perhaps while their tiny hands are grinding in the mill of daily toil for daily bread, their souls take wild flights into the realms of some grotesque ideal, where the wisest of poets might learn new secrets for his song. Minute philosophy cannot see very far into the dream-fancies of little untaught children; but it rests assured that the lightness and pleasantness of joy must oft-times shine into the hearts of the most pitiful of baby-slaves; for God is good. If our present sight shewed us *all that is*, then, indeed, might we revolt against the seeming cruel and manifold injustices of life; but everywhere circumstance is underlaid with compensations, and happiness comes more frequently from within than from without.





## II.

### THROUGH THE LANDSLIP—OVER THE DOWNS.

**T**HIS morning again is sunny and serene as June, though a crisp air blows from the east, and brings in the sea with light curls of foam on every long blue wave. The landscape is like a soft and lovely idyl; the downs are bathed in a tender glow; the sky is not dimmed by the shadow of a single cloud. No need for Robin to woo and woo me abroad to-day. Only too thankful and glad am I to throw work aside, and make holiday with him out in the joyous spring.

Wending over the southward cliffs, with the dazzling ripple chanting its slow monotone beneath, I come to a beautiful vale between two hills, sheltered from the east, and glowing like midsummer in the broad, clear sunshine. The gorse is in full bloom upon the broken ground

through which the foot-path runs, and under the hedge grow patches of sweet, pale forget-me-not, contrasting with the yellow lustre of primroses and the deeper purple of wild, scentless violets. Here peeps the spotted orchis—mystical leaf stained for ever with the holy drops that, tradition says, fell upon it as it sprung beneath the Cross ; here waves the briny bracken, the tall saxifrage ; here a thousand tints of flower and verdure wrap the rich earth in a mantle most gorgeous and fanciful. Yet this bright valley is but the avenue to a scene still brighter—to a scene of fairyland ; one of the sweetest, wildest caprices of Nature's most capacious and most tender mood. One should be eternally young here. Minute philosophy should doff its sober hood, and don the cap and bells of jocund, frolic, nonsense-age ! What a chaos of savagery, loveliness, and freakishness ! Hoary cliffs where storms might beat draped with ivy and feathery ferns ; dainty mosses creeping, caressing round their feet where the ghastly night-surges might wash up bones of dreadful wrecks ; huge ragged reefs standing out harmless in a sea of vernal beauty ; flowery palms shaking odorous gold-dust on their crowns ; the purple vetch, the

fragrant honeysuckle, the downy clematis twining about their limbs.

Let no unbeliever tell me in this enchanted forest of stone and verdure that the Fairies have forsaken the earth! In the moonlit Midsummer Nights they hold high revels here, and in the daytime they hide in the deep fissures of the cliffs, and in and out amongst the flowery bushes. You hear a soft, low trill, trill, as you go spectacled and wonder-hunting through the tangle of rock and tree—*that* is their laughter mocking at your sober airs of wisdom; a nettle stings your hand or a tiny pebble galls your foot—*that* is their spite, their idle mischief. As the moon rises over the sea, and makes a long, rippled ladder of light to the sands, the Sprites that have been down at the little clear water-pools sailing their shells haul them high up out of the reach of the foam, and begin to ascend the lower cliffs, singing a soft undersong, which you may hear at that time of night, chiming in with the sweet tinkle of the wild hyacinth bells. The melody floats like an air from one end of this Sheneland to another. The tricky things that are up at the crows' nests on the highest rocks hear it, and making quick work of

their mischief, come fluttering down in clouds ; the demure Elves that haunt the mosses and lichens, the pleasure-loving Fays that lurk in gaudy flower-cups, come forth, one and all, at the sound of the magic-music, and dance and play beneath the moon. Ah, if we could only catch them at it !

Now I am on a natural stair of steps worn in the stones. Below me spreads a wavering, changeful shadow of verdure, and beyond that lies the glorious blue calm of the sea. Descending heedfully, I wind along the rough track until the scene opens, and gentle undulations of thymy turf appear amongst the brake. Above all towers the amphitheatre of cliffs, reared like huge buttresses towards the sky.

How far off is the world where men live and thrive and fret and perish ? This might be a fragment of the earth primeval before the footsteps of mortals had penetrated its sweet seclusions. And yet but a few paces more, and I see smoke rolling upwards, dimming the blue sky, and a quaint old church and church-yard on which the sunshine is slanting brightly down. Every where Life has its mute shadow Death beside it !

The gate is locked, but, leaning over it, amongst the many undistinguished mounds, I see two graves, one lying peacefully under the Shadow of the Cross, the other with its headstone set against the wall—a name and a date its only inscription. The grass at its foot grows wild and long. It looks forlorn in its unkempt corner, but there is light enmeshed amongst the tangled spears—pure light of purest day. Watching its tender touches on the green, the story of his life who rests beneath, told by two who loved him, comes back to me with a deeper pathos; and there goes wandering up and down in my mind that noble strain from “In Memoriam,” where the poet, speaking of one “perplexed in faith but pure in deeds,” says—

“There lives more faith in honest doubt,  
Believe me, than in half the creeds.”

The fretted shade of ancient trees lies on the mossy roof, and over the winding lane up to the village, which is a perfect bower of greenery. High on the hill stands the new Church, and round about it a lovely garden of graves, the very heart's desire as a place to be buried in; so hushed and calm is it, so holy-fair, shut in from world's work and dust

by cliff and sky. I wander along the road below towards the lake with its wilderness of wood and fern rising behind in every tint of Spring, and casting deep wavering reflections across the water. The glassy darkness has the effect of a cold light in the landscape, or of the cool shadow of a still, gray day—pleasant, refreshing, restful, after all the brilliance and glitter of the vivid sea, and the shimmering changefulness of the sunny Sheneland I have left. The ripples ripple under my eyes in their silent monotony until they seem to be rippling over my fancy and lulling it into a drowsy quiet. In this mood, I know not exactly how, I have the sense of walking as in a dream, up a wide, white road, through a busy street, with the down above and the sea below; then of climbing, climbing, climbing by little chalky notches, the steep swelling side of a great hill, and emerging into the full tide of wind and spring-weather upon its top.

A breeze this to blow the cobwebs out of the mistiest brain, and a scene to dilate the poorest heart! There fly the swift clouds, like wings of the wind; the shadows on the hills following them down to the sea, and hurrying over it, a glorious aerial army gathering to the battle whence they

will return with their poor shreds of conquest and a great shout triumphant.

What old wife's tale is it that prophecies war by the serried columns of the sky, and sees signs of bloody death in the heavens?

How beautiful, how tranquil, how gracious is all in earth and air to-day! No warning of tumult, no forecasting of woe. Green are the rich valleys, green are the pleasant hills—no voice louder than the voice of birds and the ever-living song of the sea. Peace universal should reign in a world so fair!\* Yet I hear a dull surge swelling up in the distance; nearer and nearer roll its red waves; armed hosts tramping to death in the name of Liberty—Heaven bless their banners! armed hosts tramping to death in the name of Glory—of Glory carrying a sheaf of masks in her hand; now grinning like greedy Guile, then like specious Saviour, again like awful Avenger, but always with a deadly enmity to olive-bearing Peace in her rash and arrogant soul. How long ere God's hand will pluck off the cruel disguises?

But why come dark previsions over this bright idyllic scene? Deep in the soft, quiet valleys rest

\* Written in 1861.

the little hamlets, tower or spire pointing heavenwards in their midst. Alas, no home so sheltered, no hearth so recluse, but the echo of battle may sound there the note of bereavement and anguish!

My fancy has struck this solemn key, and the sonorous roll of the dead-march follows me all over the hills. My heart was tuned to gentle, dreamy vagaries, but the loud winds have chased them away, and filled it with noisier aspirations. And they keep me exciting company until I am down again in the sheltered, balmy lanes, where I see a vision in my memory of a pale mother in the cold dark of winterly mornings, watching, waiting, beating to and fro the road with unresting feet until the daily messenger comes with his tidings from the War.

Is it life or is it death? Oh, mother, it is *death!*

Is it victory or is it defeat? It is victory!

Loud rings the triumph-cry in the streets—hot fall the tears within. Mother, thou hast given to thy country a son—thy first-born, thy darling; a brave soldier and a good man. God comfort thee!







### III.

#### BY THE SEA-SHORE.

**I** HAVE a great veneration for cloudlessness —for bright, warm serenity. It is always with something of an effort that I front the chilling visage of such a morning as this. Nevertheless, my courage once braced up, I turn out and wend my way through the deep, miry lane to the Chine-Head, where the rivulet is pouring down full and noisily ; through the rustic gate, by the winding path, and the winding steps into the damp and shady ravine. There is not much sun to-day, and it is filled with a cold gray easterly haze. Dark ivy mantles the lower cliffs, and the great ferns are uncurling their broad fronds ; the slender trees are in leaf and will soon be in blossom, but it looks now all gloomy and weird, and sad under the inhospitable pallor of a cloudy sky. See it in the sunshine, in the streaked

and shimmering lustrousness of a June morning—then it is fair, then it is lovely. To-day I do not linger in it but hasten down to the shore.

There is a steady, low breeze, an ebbing tide, and a broad level of hard, ribbed sand; no brightness but a cold, sharp, distinct outline of cliff, of distant down and distant seas. I set my face eastward and march forward in the teeth of the wind, with the waves rolling over and over a few paces off. Their sound is heavy and sonorous as the chords of an organ, long thrilling and resounding in the high arches of a cathedral. The melody to this grand chorus is in a minor key—now a low, wailing, piercing cry; then a quick, sobbing pant as of wings shaken in the air; again a sweet, sad murmur like the breath of an Eolian harp. For a few moments there is a stillness; then the rush of music is renewed in the changeful monotony of an aerial rondo—shriek and sob and murmur in the upper notes, and solemn, lengthened chords in the measured bass; a majestic choral service of praise to Him who holds the waters in the hollow of His hand.

Presently I come to low rocks with deep, clear little pools between, in the depths of which the sea-

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weeds, pink and white and green and olive, form wonderful marine gardens. As I am peering into one of these fantastic under-water groves, a ray of sunlight struggles through the clouds, and glances across it, making a thousand sparkles flash out on the surface to dazzle my inquisitive eyes. But the "purple twilight" of the sea is lost for a moment only; the gray closes up again over the sky, and the stray beam is eclipsed.

Here and there a white wing flashes low over the water, and in the clear distance is a ship—a ship homeward-bound, perhaps from the far lands of the East. I imagine the sea-wearied passengers looking out for the white cliffs and the green hills of home with brightened, apathetic eyes. What will they find there? Old familiar faces grown strange; children budding into men and women; fathers and mothers become gray and feeble; brothers and sisters heart-crowded with their own cares; solitary graves where they left warm hearths. Methinks there are few meetings again after long separation without secret pangs for change or for indifference!

And here lies a bit of driftwood,—a decayed relic of some good ship, with a rusted nail or two hang-

ing in it still ; a bit of driftwood that the last tide has left high and dry upon the sands. Oh, the story, the sad, sad story of that bit of driftwood!

In what forest grew the once green heart of oak ? Who built the bonny craft ? From what port sailed she ? Who sailed in her ? Where was she cast away ? Are any waiting in the long deferred hope that makes the heart sick for tidings of a ship and her crew that will come back no more ? This fragment is rotten now ; it would crumble under the pressure of a heel ; it has been beaten to and fro the wide waters many a fair day and tranquil night since, in the wrack of tempest, the timbers parted and the gallant sailors went down. Perhaps vain expectation has crumbled too, and the bereft hearts have ceased from their weariful longing.

What glorious tales rise in my remembrance at the sight of this poor bit of driftwood ! What perils dared, what grand endurance, what lofty courage in the front of death !

Great deeds cannot perish. In the history of those adventurous explorers dropping one by one in the regions of eternal frost, there is the grandeur, the pathos, the tragedy of all that is good and beautiful in mortal life. Pilgrimages are made to

other famous shrines in idleness and curiosity ; but through every age the hearts of the young will make pilgrimage devout in enthusiastic sympathy and admiration to those lonely sepulchres upon the Arctic shore. Such heroic seed of faithful duty as lies sown in those icy furrows springs up again from generation to generation, and blossoms into noble daring and noble fortitude that do honour to our frail humanity. The tender soul kindles into purifying fire at the sound of what has been ventured and what has been done, and blazes up emulous of the glory that hallows the great dead.

And where is the register of those brave and simple men who, on our own midnight shores, have gone forth to rescue the perishing, and have perished themselves within sight of home? They stand upon no famous battle-roll, those martyrs of duty and charity, but they are had in perpetual remembrance, as bravest where all are brave, noblest where all are noble ; for they were at ease and in safety when they took their lives in their hands, and gave them for the succour of the helpless. Many a humble fireside chronicle keeps their memory green, and heaven has the reckoning of them all.

A landscape without water is to me almost as dull as a landscape without sunshine. When it becomes familiar it becomes oppressive, because there is no movement in it. I love the idea of something flowing onwards, ever onwards beyond our ken, as life itself flows on into the mystery of eternity. Give me a tiny streamlet, trilling and sparkling its solitary way down a glen-side, or a river rushing through the arches of a bridge, or a glimpse of sea in the distance, and it is enough ; I feel no loneliness, no despondent sickness of soul where thought has a visible outlet, and can float away on the waters from the monotony of the present time into the dim region of things unseen, and take its fill of fancies.

Neither sweet woodland nor blue cloud-piercing hills have for me this strange fascination : for dreams and aspirations of youth they suffice, but when the days of our life lie half behind us, this syren-singing in our ears has ceased to beguile or charm, and we listen for the voices which speak more faithfully, if less pleasantly, of the world and its halting accidents.

For nearly thirty years of my life my home, with but few and brief intervals, was always at one point

or another of the same river's course, and that is perhaps the reason why no landscape satisfies my eye or my heart unless there be a liquid light shining in its green solemnity. I am far away from it now, but I have forgotten none of the scenes on its banks, vividly writ in the picture-book of memorials which garnishes the libraries of most folks that have done with youth. From its innocent, fern-crowned spring-head, down to the dreary port where it meets the salt tide of the sea, I know it, almost every mile ; but the delight of its scenery dawned on me first up in the romantic north-western dale country, where agile young feet can skip with swift safety from rock to rock across it ; where it is pure, fresh, unstained ; where the darkest shadows on its clear flood are shadows of overhanging trees, shivered through with sunshine ; or shadows of crags round which its white eddies spurn in sparkling disdain, and toss up showers of laughing spray.

In winter the waters are out for many and many a mile, and vast, lake-like expanses flood the meadows where in summer the cattle daintily feed. When I saw it last it was flowing tamely between its banks, and the pastures at the Scope were

covered with full-uddered herds. It was a hushed and dreamy evening—not a rustle in the air to stir the tall, pale, cuckoo-flowers in the grass, not a bird-note, not a cloud to shade the calm levels of the sunshine. I was there alone, who had been young in that place with merry companions, not, as it seemed, so very long ago. And yet what changes within and without !

Roses bloomed in the hedges then, and the romance of hope and fancy lurked in every cup ; now the luxuriant flower-growth is pruned away, and the horizon of the fields is no more the illimitable Sheneland of Imagination, but the moderate bounds of Experience, and another flat of green meads with a few trees beyond. A deep-laden boat working up against the stream is a fair emblem of life and its labour as I have known them best ; patient, steadfast, in earnest ; safe, slow, sure ; with necessity for a helm, resolution for an oar, and industry for an anchor. Not ambitious of great things, reaching contentedly the goal of its humble endeavours, and thankful to escape the shoals and reefs in its monotonous course, that it may gain the haven unbroken, and land its freight at last.



“The night once come, our happiness, our unhappiness—it is all abolished, vanished, clean gone, a thing that has been—not of the slightest consequence. But our work—behold, that is not abolished, that has not vanished. Our work, behold that remains or the want of it remains—and that is now the sole question with us for evermore. What hast thou done, and how? Where is thy work? Swift, out with it. Let us see thy work.”

So saith the modern seer, uttering an eternal verity. Not discouraging the humble who toil honestly at mean crafts, nor exalting the emulous who fall short in mighty endeavours, but calling for the task which the great Master has given to each to do, and willing earnestly that it be well done. Uncouth barge beating up the river, or stately ship with favouring winds and tide upon the sea—quiet worker working at an obscure and despised portion or hero glorified of fame and the world—each can but do his best; his powers, his opportunities, God-given even as his duty. Success and Failure, as men call them, are done away when the task goes up for judgment, and the delight or the weariness of it, the pride or the pain, vanish into the limbo of shadows for all eternity.

Suddenly the wind has veered about, and the sky has changed its dull gray to a lurid tint, as if the vaulted roof behind the clouds were of heated copper. A thundrous heaviness broods in the air; hollow reverberations roll among the distant hills, while a veil of purple vapour is drawn darkly over them. What a strange gloom—what a weird, passionate expression on the face of nature! It must dissolve in tears soon, or else burst into wild storm.

The black mood continues, and I quicken my pace, being further from shelter than is pleasant in the wet squall that will probably end it; but just as I begin to climb the steep zigzag to the top of the cliffs, in the intention of returning swiftly home, down comes the shower, pitiless, pelting! It cannot be avoided, therefore it must be borne with cheerfulness. To minute philosophy there is always a taste of comfort in that *must* inevitable; and now there is also somewhat to indemnify me for a drenching, in the wonderfully beautiful atmospheric changes that are passing over the landscape.

Below lies the turbid sea, darkened by a sombre curtain of clouds; and behind and before sweeps

the soft rounded outline of the downs, with the village sheltered in the hollow. It rests in sunshine, though there is storm beyond it, and storm over my head, and ragged black vapours flitting across the dun canopy far and near. Now a weeping gleam breaks through over the sea, and a magnificent rainbow arches the dusk waters splendidly; but it fades again soon, and all is gray once more.

Rain, rain, April rain! The flowers lift up their dainty cups thirstily to be filled; the birds in the blossomed gorse that fringes the cliffs twitter merrily, and a troop of little children before me run along laughing and enjoying the inopportune shower. It is early spring with them yet, the blessed darlings, and they are ignorant of the aches and pains of minute philosophy getting into years. For my part, I am glad to be at home again, and to feel the ruddy warmth of the fire.



## VILLAGE LIFE—QUIET LIFE.

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“ Happy is England ! I could be content  
To see no other verdure than its own ;  
To feel no other breezes than are blown  
Through its tall woods.”

JOHN KEATS.





## I.

### GEORGIE.

**S**INCE I have come to live so much alone, my book of memorials has been a vast resource to me. From a simple record of events, it is growing into a minute chronicle of days and hours. When the time is long, I can talk to it—tell over my wanderings in the woods and fields, my meditations on circumstances transacting in the world, my criticisms on books, and even my Fancy-flights into the unmapped regions of What-might-have-been. Perhaps it is a trivial occupation, but amongst the thousand busy idlenesses that solitary women have invented to amuse their vacancy, I have hitherto found none that suits me so well. Now and then my conscience stings me into a reflection that it is a waste of time, and I even lay it by for a season, but never for long. It is a faithful keeper of

counsel—sometimes also a faithful giver of counsel. When I begin to reduce any little care, vexation, or foreboding to the precise terms of fact, it is marvellous how it loses in importance, or often even vanishes altogether. If I am tempted into being sentimental or discontented, a freak of sarcasm is sure to clear the air, as my pen-feather sweeps the morbid feeling away. On the whole, I am well satisfied with the serene monotony of my village life. It does not afflict my soul that I have no pronounced vocation in the world, and the dull sincerity of my mind will never let me pretend that I covet any manner of hard work. Besides, have I not had a long spell—a dozen years—of it? Enough to tire the spirit without jading it; enough to make leisure delightful, and yet leave to chosen labour its flavour and aroma still. It is pleasant now to ramble abroad contemplative, and it is pleasant to *cose* with a wise book by a bright fireside in its season; it is pleasant to take my class in the school, and it does my heart good to cheer up poor little Georgie, as he lies on his weariful bed the whole day through; but I am glad that my place in the world is no longer that of teacher, whether at home or

among strangers. I need not slave so hard that I have barely time to breathe; I shall not die worn out at last, never having genuinely lived.

People talk of drifting! It was a kind providence that drifted me into this lovely southland seaside village, when I was in search of a home, combining peace, quietness, warmth, and the costless, God-given luxury of natural beauty. Here I have them all; and the necessity for just so much work as keeps *ennui*—that stealthy weariness of humanity—from undermining my contentment.

Ah! how have I longed for rest, with aching head and aching heart, where rest there was none for the slave in the house of bondage! Toil and trouble, toil and trouble, year after year, and year after year—well! they are over now, and all the sweeter is “retired leisure” by pure force of contrast. Idle moments, dreamy pauses, between spells of work—these are mine now; and no duty neglected, no spur of conscience pricking me that I am wasting other people’s time in the indulgence of my own caprices. When I read or hear women’s pitiful pleas of nothing to do, of tedious hours, of empty, unsatisfying lives, I thank Fortune who drew for me a Working Lot, if it be



only that I can enjoy my holidays, and find them never too long—never too long!

This morning was a morning of wind and showers, but at noon the sun gleamed out amidst watery clouds, and glistened in myriads of diamond-drops upon the grass. "Twitter, twitter, chirp, chirp!" sang the birds on the bushes, and after an interval of consideration, during which I changed my mind at least six times, I determined to trust the weather, fickle though it seemed between its smiles and tears, and to have a ramble in the clear shining that is so pleasant after rain. But hardly had I left home ten minutes, when over the down swept the blind of white fog, and before the wind came whirling the sharp sleet of April snow—cold, disconsolate, uncharitable, as the sneer of a friend to one fallen into adversity.

I had just reached the end of the sandy lane, deep-rutted and unkempt, where stands the last cottage in the village; a dwelling that is decent enough when the day is fine, but which under the rainy heavens looks bare and abject as the face of poverty itself. The handsbreadth of garden shews no careful pride, or rather no leisure labour of love

to keep it neat ; a few dreary bushes pine by the palings, and a ragged creeper cranes its lank stems to the height of the roof ; it has never been pruned since the day it was a shoot, and from an overgrowth of luxuriance it has dwindled away to utter meagreness.

There was no noise of playing children about, but as my shadow passed the window, a little yellow hand drew aside the curtain, and a little face, with two great, sad, dark eyes, peeped out by the dusty geraniums that overtopped it, and Georgie's mother came to let me in. She had her baby in her arms, a tiny, wakeful, over-brisk morsel of humanity, and her usual smile of patient weariness upon her homely face. I followed her into the house, and sat down by the pallet-bed on which lies her sick boy—day and night, winter and summer, spring and autumn, the year in and the year out—on which he will never cease to lie until the merciful God takes him to a better rest.

One way and another he is very much afflicted—incurably afflicted. He may linger and linger, but all the physicians in Christendom cannot help him, or ease his pains. He is thirteen years old this April, and his countenance, though peaceful,

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wears the print of a lifetime of anguish. The shadow about his poor bed is so dark, that come Death when he will, his wing cannot but be tinged with a blessed light. How long, Georgie, how long ere you may be suffered to go to your Father in Heaven, and leave your aching, crippled frame to the earth, the spring showers and the spring daisies?

I knew him three years ago, an active little lad, just like other lads, with a heavy basket on his back, carrying round bread from the baker's; but even then, in his soft, dark eyes there was a foreshadowing of the pain and patience that speak out of them so pathetically now. He rests supported on pillows, a wee tortoiseshell kitten curled up asleep on the one side, and a heap of hymn-books on the other. When he is at his best he can knit coarse white knitting; when he suffers he can see his mother's face of pitying love, and catch a glimpse of heaven above the geranium in the window-sill. It is one of his good days to-day, and he talks wearily of the kitten, and its wanton freaks; then reminds me of a fussy white Persian of mine, which he used to be friends with long ago, when he brought the weekly bread to my door. He has a very exact remembrance of its familiar

ways, for Tricksy begged play of every one, and is sorry to hear he welcomes nobody with flourish of tail and gurgling cry any more, but lies in honourable grave under a rose-bush in the garden. Then he tells me further anecdotes of his own drowsy pet, and we talk on for half an hour, neither very wisely nor very deeply, while his mother sits by the fire with the crowing baby nestled in her lap.

Standing on a stool by the dresser is a little maid of four, with eyes like Georgie's, and loose rings of bright, fair hair about her neck and rosy cheeks. She is holding a solemn tea-party with two dolls and a splendid leaden equipage of cups, nearly as big as thimbles. Shreds of leaves stand good for cake, and nectar of air for tea. She carries on the game with serious purpose, and is not diverted from it even by the gift of ginger-snaps, which she nibbles absently while exercising the rites of hospitality towards her wooden guests. Whenever I watch children at what we call their play, it always strikes me that it is their earnest business,—the only business into which they enter with zest, and also the most trustworthy and original manifestation of their, as yet,

undeveloped hearts and brains. Perhaps we are not enough observant of children at their play.

There have been born half a dozen babies to the father and mother of this house, all of whom are thriving, except Georgie, and he is the eldest but one. A good Providence only knows how they have lived!

My feeling on some subjects that are now much in vogue is strictly heterodox. I know it, but cannot honestly deplore it. That "the poor man's wisdom is despised," was a proverb in King Solomon's time, and it has not lost weight in ours. Yet are the poor indeed, in *very* deed, but children of an older growth, whom the busy-idle rich may school with vague theories and lessons at second-hand; or are they men and women with a real and useful knowledge of their own, learnt direct from experience, from labour, pain, and necessity, such as their would-be teachers can never know? Because we have a little book-lore, a little chronology of names and dates, a puzzled glimpse of historical ages, and a confused philosophy in our often addled brains, are we of right so much wiser than they, who began the bread-winning work of the world when we were learning from books by

rote, that we must needs preach to them our Gospel of Improvement, and expect them to receive it at our mouths unquestioned?

The well-to-do have certainly got the pen-hand of the poor, and write as if they were for ever in leading-strings; but it by no means follows that they possess a monopoly of wisdom for all that. If the balance were restored a few degrees, if the gift of tongues were transferred, if the labouring man and woman had time to talk, which they have not, I cannot help thinking that their observations would often shew a point and practical clearness which the other side as frequently lacks. It is almost miraculous how much the working poor accomplish with how little; how many children they bring up by decent thrift to respectable manhood and womanhood, and how few amongst the millions go astray. I confess that, instead of looking down on them with superior pity, and trying to indoctrinate them with my little *ought* and *should*, I am far more inclined to admire and wonder how they do it.

It is commonly objected to them, that they lack forethought; but, as a rule, they are fettered too fast with the riveted cares of to-day's wants to be

able to stretch out the hand of forethought over the morrow. If we could only imagine ourselves in their shoes for a single year! If we could realise the expedients by which rent, food, fire, and clothing are provided for six or eight souls out of an income of twelve shillings a week, we should have worked a sum in social economics which might, perhaps, give us some slight title to talk of the thriftlessness, the extravagance, the sensuality of the poor; but, Lord save us! by that time I think we should have learnt to hold our peace.

I am not yet fully persuaded that much book-learning is so essential to the well-being of the rising generation as it is the fashion to suppose. The end of education and training is plainly fitness for the duties of the station to which we are born and called. In fact, I think book-learning has acquired a somewhat fictitious value in this age, which experiment will by and by lower very materially. Handicraft skill and household cunning are far more to the purpose in the lives of those men and women who must earn their bread by labour and servitude, than is a hazy confusion of imperfect literature. Your working man cannot define the meaning of *esthetic*—probably never

heard the word—but neither can you make a lock, turn a door-handle, drive a plough, or build a wall. Your well-found servant-maid trips seriously in her grammar, whether written or spoken, but she can serve you a comfortable dinner, take motherly care of your children, sew, scour, brush, and burnish to perfection. It is not within the limits of the ordinary human capacity to do all things equally well, and I am old-fashioned enough in my ways of feeling, to prefer useful, practical knowledge and aptitude in working folks, to accurate spelling, to complicated arithmetic, to lists of fixed stars, to geography, history, or even muslin embroidery; and my reason why will go into a nut-shell.

I receive the groans of many friends who are in bondage to servants of the new school, while I am blessed myself in the possession of one of the old order, who can turn a hand to anything, and is not above so turning it. Her native shrewdness, improved and polished by the discipline of hard work, is an uncommonly fine thing, whether done into speech or practice; her homely phrases, her industry, honesty, and trustiness are as invaluable as—if I may believe my neighbours' pitiful com-



plaints—they are rare. And yet when I am absent from home, and she writes to me, I am obliged to read the document aloud to get at the sense phonetically; but capital sense it is when got at, though the orthography is awful. She is a great reader, especially of her Bible and story-books. Her memory is tenacious of the smallest facts; she is an unerring register of names and dates, mistress of weights and measures, and of enough summing for household purposes. One distinguished accomplishment she also possesses—she can “go to market in French,” having lived four years as cook with an English family in Brussels; and she is as expert at plain needlework, clear-starching, and sick-nursing as at all other plain duties of female servitude. And she is never touchily above the doing of any tasks that may devolve upon her.

“Oh, the pride and ambition of the pedlar’s dog!” was her comical and not inapt exclamation when she heard of a set-up young damsel of this high-learnt generation indignantly declining to carry a respectable brown market-basket to the village shop. I would not say but that she has a clear and full appreciation of her own value—but it is

allowed to persons of merit to be aware of it; and Dinahs are scarce.

And there is Georgie's mother—probably her syntax is queer, and her orthography not very exact when she writes a letter to her eldest boy at service in London; but what does it matter? To all intents and purposes she is as wise, as good, as tender as the most grammatical of women! In toil unceasing, in anxiety unsleeping, in tortured love at the sight of pangs she cannot alleviate, she has acquired the beautiful patience, the submission, the active helpfulness that uphold her in a life outwardly so dreary and bare of hope. My lips would stammer had I the presumption to teach one taught of experience thus sternly. Tell her what to think and how to think it, what to do and how to do it, what to feel and how to feel it, when she has stood thus for years face to face with the sharp trials of labour, sorrow, and pain, learning life's hardest lessons line by line, and day by day. Such as her lot is, He who portioned it out to her gives her strength to bear it, and courage to make the best of it. Weak and faint must be the tenderest words of the unafflicted to the whispers of heavenly comfort God breathes into the sore hearts of His suffer-

ing and patient poor ; and foolish our finest theories in comparison with the simple wisdom, earned of that suffering and patience which is still too often counted amongst things despised.

She is a little fagged woman to look at, Georgie's mother ; not very tidy in her person, or very clean in her house—deficiencies that are to be allowed for in consideration of her having but one pair of hands to do work enough for two or three. It is about Georgie's bed that rally the most successful efforts at a decent and even ornamental propriety. His corner has quite a literary air, strewn with the good little books which beguile his long and lonely days when he has no visitors from out of doors. On the wall opposite where he lies hangs a daily text of Scripture in large type, comfortable to meditate or repose upon. He has many friends—everybody who knows Georgie is sorry for him, and loves him. Yet he does not look sad or self-pitying at all. It is the easiest thing in the world to bring a smile to his lips. He has a dimple in his cheek and beautiful eyes that would laugh were it not for the filmy cloud pain has drawn over them.

Georgie was born here, and village-lad-like, he knows every copse, and wood, and bird-haunt

within miles around. I told him to-day of a clearing that is going on in one of the wildest, and immediately he cried, "O mother, do you remember when I was lost there with Billy?" and forthwith proceeds to recount the disasters of a nutting holiday, and brightens into cheerfulness.

This is our sort of talk. When I leave him I never carry away a feeling of depression such as you might suppose. Three years to us seem a long term of captivity to pain; and yet, to hear him tell his little adventures, they might have befallen him only yesterday. If he be a prisoner, surely the unseen hand of some ministering angel of God holds the weight of his chains that they press not too heavily on his childish limbs, nor gall too painfully his tender soul! Dwelling on his quiet face, I cannot but think so and be thankful.





## II.

### IN THE GARDEN.

**O**NCE more the weather is settled, and Spring is quite at home with us at last! Now is the busiest, pleasantest out-door time of all my year. My garden is a mere span of a place, but it has a fine expanse of meadow and wood, of down and sea to look over, and just glimpse enough of neighbours to do away with its air of loneliness. And what health, holiday-work, and enjoyment I extract from its unwilling borders, where the plants come up too often to be storm-beaten and broken ere they reach their prime; for if the ground lies fairly to the southern sun, it lies also on the slope of a hill, and is in the way of every blast that blows. When other places are serene and sheltered, the strong west wind tears over my little plots, and makes the roses writhe like things tormented. Away fly their petals, pink and white and damask-

red, strewing the grass with showers of ravished beauty, which are sear and dead before the night. The carnations wag their heavy heads like insane groups of mandarins; the fuschias, salvias, and geraniums snap off short at their roots, too frail and brittle to withstand the stormy trial for an hour. In the morning the garden is gay with a thousand blossoms; in the evening it is a ruinous and doleful waste. Then I become active, that I may not be distressed. The wind has given me some work, but it is work that pleases me, that engages my mind and my hands; and a few calm sunshiny days set all right again. Crocus and snow-drop, primrose and wall-flower, violet and saxifrage have made bright the borders until now, but they will not reign much longer unrivalled; for to-day the weather was so still and lovely, that after breakfast I did my first spell of work out of doors.

In his "Essaie of Gardens," Lord Bacon says—"God *Almightie* first Planted a *Garden*. And indeed, it is the Purest of Humane Pleasures. It is the Greatest Refreshment to the Spirits of Man." Then he goes on to suggest that there ought to be gardens for every month in the year, and recites, in the order of their blooming and fruitage, all the

old-fashioned flowers and orchard-trees that we find about ancient manor-houses and farmsteads, but miss sorely elsewhere. "And because the *Breath* of Flowers is farre sweeter in the Aire (where it comes and goes like the Warbling of Musicke) then in the hand, therefore nothing is more fit for that delight, then to know what be the *Flowers* and *Plants* that doe best perfume the Aire." And so he proceeds to tell us that the violet, especially the white double-Violet which comes twice a-year, about the middle of April and about Bartholomew-tide, yields the sweetest smell of all. Next to that is the Musk-Rose; then the Strawberry-leaves dying; then the Flower of the Vines; then Sweet-briar; then Wall-Flowers, Pinks, and Gilly-flowers; then the Flowers of the Lime-tree; then Honey-Suckles, so they be somewhat far off. "Of Beane Flowers I speake not, because they are Field Flowers," he adds, but even in not speaking of them he names them amongst his most fragrant joys. He would have whole alleys of Burnet, Wilde-time, and Water-mints, which being trodden and crushed perfume the air most delightfully. But "as for the making of Knots and Figures with Divers Coloured Earths

that they may lie under the Windowes of the House, they be but Toyes ; you may see as good Sights many times in Tarts ;” and sights not much better in modern geometrical gardens.

It would be pleasant on a morning like this to wander at will through a Heath such as that of the great Chancellor’s devising. The lovely May sunshine would bring out in perfection the odour of its thickets of Sweet-briar, Honey-Suckles, and Wild Vine ; and though the Violets and Prime-Roses would be over, there would be Cowslips and Daisies, “and the like Low Flowers, being withal Sweet and Sightly.” As for Aviaries, he likes them not, “except they be of that Largenesse as they may be Turfied and have Living Plants and Bushes set in them ; that the Birds may have more Scope and Naturall Neastling ;” in which I go with him hand and heart. Give me free birds or none. I make them welcome to every berry on my bushes for their singing’s sake. The evening chorus of the thrushes in the trees beyond my garden is exquisite. I know the voice of one of the choir. He haunts the grass familiarly, and though I have tried no taming artifices upon him, does not fly away at my approach. I wish guns



and traps were not. I had a pair of wagtails, pretty, friendly things, last year, but they are gone, and no doubt some young naturalist of my neighbours could give account of their disappearance. There is a black-cap that wakes after sunset in a low oak not a stone's-throw from my gate, and I never hear a gun go off but my heart leaps lest some boy in wantonness of sport should have silenced his sweet throat for ever.

The season of bird-nesting has diminished my class of boys at the Sunday-School from six to three. The truants are busy on work-a-days under the eye of father or master, but on the weekly holiday, when mother has spruced them up for church and school, the young urchins betake themselves to the woods and hedgerows, and my mark-book reports them absent Sunday after Sunday. My best boys, too—my nicest and cleverest. The three slow boys continue faithful to my instructions, and oh! it is such hard dull work teaching them without the leaven of naughtiness and intelligence which is soonest beguiled into pleasant temptations. I met one of the delinquents in the lane a few days since, and inquired of him when bird-nesting would be over. He coloured and looked rather shame-

faced, but he smiled, too, and on my saying I should be glad to see him again when the season was past, he touched his cap and intimated that it was his intention to return. Perhaps I ought to have lectured him, but it was a sunny afternoon, and nothing appropriate to the occasion came into my mind, therefore the opportunity escaped unimproved. Was I tongue-tied by some secret, unsuspected sympathy in his pursuits? Should I have played truant and gone bird-nesting had I been a boy? It is not impossible, though I lose patience in reading about mighty hunters who betake themselves to primeval solitudes to kill and destroy, and with the acute youngsters who collect *specimens* by scores. The ways and habits of God's creatures may be better studied living than dead; and if the knowledge of natural history amongst children can only be advanced through the practical cruelty and reckless indifference to life which some mannikins betray, it is high time they found a more pertinent name for their hobby than *The Love of Nature*.

While I was working in my flower-borders this morning, Kester arrived—the notorious old repro-

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bate who has charge of my hedge and shrubs; of the clipping and pruning and planting that are beyond my strength. He made his usual remarks on the positive or comparative favourableness of the weather, and then observed that the grass would be the better for cutting. I agreed with him, and he proceeded to roll it forthwith in readiness for the morrow.

The labour market is not overstocked here ; between the scarcity of hands and the touchy dignity of the individuals to whom the few there are belong it is very difficult to get odd jobs done in our village ; and I therefore esteem myself somewhat lucky in having retained Kester's services uninterruptedly ever since my settlement here, though his repute is of the very worst. I was not aware of this when he first took to my garden. He appeared to me only a good-natured, quiet, rather dilatory man, who knew about flowers and was fond of them ; and as he came without sending for, did what was wanted without trouble, and never interfered amongst my little devices, I gradually grew to consider him man-of-all-work to the place, and congratulated myself that my garden had been

found out and adopted by so generally useful and peaceable a character.

But my serene contentment was not destined to continue long undisturbed. First one friend and then another remarked to me in a dubious tone—"So you employ Kester, do you?" and at length our good pastor apprised me that he was of all men in the parish the most drunken and dissolute. What was to be done? If my neighbours had warned me beforehand I would not have engaged him; but having engaged him, and found no cause of complaint against him thus far, I compromised the matter with my advisers and my conscience by promising to discharge him the first time he misconducted himself by coming drunk to me. That is just five years ago; my condition is unbroken, and he serves me still.

Last winter he changed his quarters to another village three miles off, and then I anticipated he would give my garden up. I had a respectable substitute strongly recommended to me, but I could not find in my heart to bid him welcome until poor old Kester gave in his resignation, which I now begin sincerely to hope he does not mean to

do; for I still hear him sharpening his scythe below my bedroom window at four o'clock of dewy mornings, and he still comes over after rough weather, as he came to-day, to see if he is wanted for putting things to rights. He is more leisurely than ever over his work, and more than ever given to pauses of dreamy abstraction; but I have got used to his peculiar ways, and bear his shortcomings for custom's sake. I do not like strange people about me either indoors or out. My attachments are slow of growth, but, being rooted, they last.

Kester always looks vague and unhappy, poor old fellow, and I have been warned that he is an atheist. He is not very communicative about himself; he understands flowers, and I could never have courage to question him as to his principles. He told me, when first he worked here, that his wife had been a very pious, good woman, and that when he lost her he was so lonely he gave up housekeeping. He has a little property, which enables him to lead a life half of play—perhaps his great temptation and misfortune. His sons are steady men, and prosperous; and with one of them he lives. This son is married, and Kester

speaks of his daughter-in-law with respectful affection.

Once, under pressure of experienced advice, I gave in to believing for a day that I ought not to continue Kester in my employment, and I spoke to a worthy, laborious, serious chapel-goer, who does odds and ends of gardening for my neighbours, about taking his place. He declined it—said Kester had his faults—yes, he *did* drink, between-whiles; but he was a good neighbour, and he had not a word to say against him: he could not do him an ill turn—no, he could not take work out of his hands. So now, when any one takes me to task on the subject, I lift up the Methodist's testimony in support of my own, and maintain that perhaps even poor, drunken, free-thinking Kester is not quite so bad as he is commonly painted. I do not believe he is.





### III.

#### FANNY MARSHALL'S TWINS.

“**P**LEASE, ma'am, mother says will you give her something towards the babies?” I was busy this noon in my garden tying up the long flower-stalks of a rich carnation which the wind had loosened, when my ears were assailed by this queer-sounding request; and looking up, I found myself face to face with a chubby little maiden of ten years old, decently equipped from top to toe, rosy, audacious, and merry as you please. “Who is your mother, child? I don't know you,” was my interrogative response; but the moment the words were out of my lips, it flashed upon me that it must be Fanny Marshall, only considerably grown and increased in every direction since I used to see her some harvests back, hanging to the skirts of the shepherd's wife, who took her whole family into the corn-fields

when she went a-gleaning. The procession at that date consisted of mother and baby in arms, baby in go-cart, three boys on a graduated scale, able to walk, and one girl—this identical, round-about woman in miniature, who had come to petition me for something towards the *twins*, which I now remembered to have heard jubilantly announced one Sunday morning six weeks ago, by a warm-hearted, charitable, enthusiastic maiden-lady, of my friends; as if they did not make eight children in a labouring man's cottage, but were born heirs to easy circumstances, good educations, and all the choicest privileges of humanity. I remarked at the time that I thought babies rather capriciously dealt, and was reproved with a parable about two women, one rich and the other poor, which I shall not pause to repeat here, as it was not very germane to the subject, and did not influence my views at all.

The precocious, practical shrewdness of poor folks' children—girls especially—always excites my wonder and admiration. Mistress Fanny had the length of my foot in no time. She detailed the advent of the babies, mother's surprise at two, her own satisfaction in having a little new sister, and



the accumulation of needs which the unexpected pair had brought in their wake. I inquired where she had been collecting contributions before she came to me, and she stated explicitly that she had been nowhere. It is a habit of mine to believe what I am told; and the broad, smiling, round-eyed maiden looked me so pleasantly and frankly in the face that I should as soon have thought of doubting the blessed sunshine as doubting the words that tript from her ten-year-old tongue. Mother, she said, wanted chiefly more nourishing food and clothes for the twins; so I dismissed her with a promise that I would pay her and them a visit in the afternoon.

Dinah was as much pleased with fluent Mistress Fanny as myself, and before I set out for the shepherd's cottage she bade me cross the babies' hands with silver for luck, but just insinuated one or two words of caution against allowing pity to carry me over the borders of prudence. "People here don't know what real poverty means; they are too well looked after," observed she; and in a general way I agreed with her, but added that twins must be a trial to a labouring man, under the best of circumstances. She could not gainsay it.

Mistress Fanny espied me coming up the steep bit of garden, and had the cottage door open before I reached it. She ushered me in with smiles and bobs, promptly set me a chair, and with a comprehensive circular gesture introduced me to the babies in their cot, to her mother drinking tea by the fireside, and to three fat, rosy boys sucking their thumbs in corners. How that cat-witted, short-sighted damsel must have laughed in her sleeve at my simplicity when I sat down and made my little remarks, asked my little questions, and executed my little good intentions! The scene tickles my fancy amazingly as I recall it.

The shepherd's wife had been well known to me by sight for some years, and I now found in her that perfect ease and composure of manner which so much facilitates the making of a personal acquaintance. She looked pale and very interesting with her remains of prettiness; and she talked, oh! excellently well. Not with a whine of drivelling complaint, but with a serene assurance of accusation that covered me with hot confusion and shame for obvious Christian and neighbourly duties neglected. She should have thought, she said, that in a village like ours there would have been plenty of ladies to

come forward and do something for a poor woman in her situation ; but she had had no help—none ; a blanket from the parsonage and gruel for a week, and that was all. For herself, she lived on bread and tea, which I might suppose was very insufficient diet for a nursing mother with twins. Them she fed chiefly on bread and sugar, having very little milk to give them ; and as for clothes, when the bag was taken away, which it would be next week, she did not really know what she should do.

I sighed in acquiescent sympathy ; but still, with some view of self-exculpation, I ventured to remark that as her husband was in work all the year round, and receiving good wages, while her two eldest boys, being employed under him, earned at least their keep, she was hardly a person to whom charity would come unsought. She replied that she needed it as much as any ; bade me consider what was left for food, after house-rent, fuel, shoes, and clothing were provided out of their weekly wages ; and assured me that from month's end to month's end her children tasted nothing but bread, potatoes, and now and then a scrap of the dry native cheese. They could not have looked better if they had lived on the fat of the land ; for more thriving,

healthy, hardy urchins I never beheld ; and this I said. She admitted that they were stout and strong, and then immediately reverted to her own numerous and pressing necessities, and the culpable negligence of her well-to-do neighbours who had not averted them.

She was too clever and experienced a woman to talk *goody*—there was not a tinge of cant about her. Such were her circumstances, such her wants, and such her opinion of the ungiving village community around her. Mistress Fanny stood on a stool at the wash-tub, listening demurely, and scrubbing with might and main. Her mother extolled her as being a second right hand in the house—useful, active, and trusty beyond her years. I readily believed it ; she was a picture of virtuous and premature toilsomeness which could not but earn an honest and pathetic tribute of admiration from all unprejudiced observers.

It is my firm persuasion that there are a number of kind folks in the world who are only too glad to know where they can do a little real good without alloy of mischief ; and when I had crossed the babies' palms with silver, as Dinah bade me, and promised their mother such help from my kitchen

as I could afford her weekly, I determined to plead the cause of the twins and their pale nurse with one or two women not blessed in child-cares of their own; but first I went to a comfortable matron to inquire of her the cut of little garments; and she volunteered to have some made for me in the school, of which she is mistress, if I would find the materials. But having undertaken this, she somewhat abated the ardour of my charitable fit by saying that of course twins *were* hard on a working-man, but that the shepherd's wife would lack nothing that could be got by asking for it. She was a systematic beggar, and sent Mistress Fanny round by house-row to levy contributions on all who would give!

To this remarkable statement, which fell on my ears with a chilling shock of surprise, I objected that she had only been to me for the *first* time to-day. "It will not be the *last*," was the significant answer. "You have come in your turn. But it is not food or clothing Fanny's mother likes to receive—it is money—and of that she has gleaned a good deal here and there; and coals she has had, I know. Still, ma'am, I daresay she can do with the baby-things—only, don't give her money. She

needs nothing where need comes, and you'll have no thanks. She takes it all as her due, and the more you give her the more she will ask of you."

On making inquiries in other authentic quarters, to modify or justify this accusation, I found that having been *Nowhere* in the vocabulary of cunning little Mistress Fanny meant having been *Everywhere*, and that her name was almost synonymous with trickery and mendicancy. The mother made a regular practice of sending her out to beg; and the quaint address which had startled me while busy tying up my straggling carnations was familiar all over the parish!

I do not imagine that such a case as this would find many parallels amongst the hardest-driven poor, though I have heard of their deceits and ingratitude as being perpetual discouragements to those whose means and whose leisure are expended in charitable efforts to benefit them. The shepherd's wife and clever Mistress Fanny have cried "Wolf!" so often, when no wolf was at their door, that they have worn out the most patient givers, and earned themselves a pernicious notoriety. But I more than half suspect that in their present strait they have cried "Wolf!" to very little purpose, and are

really in want. And as *want*, not *desert*, is the sovereign plea for help, I will not regret my day's work; but what I have promised with my eyes shut, I will give with my eyes open—only appeasing my conscience and mortified discernment by letting them understand that they are open, and that the length of their tether with me is reached.

When I told Dinah my story, she said it would be a lesson of caution. Many such lessons of caution would, I fear, lay the very uneasy pavement of suspicion; so I trust I may profit by the one I have had, and need no other.





#### IV.

##### THE PLEASANTNESS OF SIMPLE PLEASURES.

**T**HIS is a May evening. Graciously, tenderly falls the mellow sunshine on the garden-turf—on the soft, westward slope of the down—on the reddened tops of the elms. It is a lovely, serene view, this from my window. The Church-spire pierces the leafy greenness at the foot of the hills, and the Manor Farm stands square and gray against a background of copse, where emerald larches mingle their bright colour with black masses of pine. Glimpses of twilight-sea shine between the tall fir-trees in the hollow, but the most precious bit in all the picture is the sweet curve of the lane, seen under the hedgerow where it leads steeply up to the farm. There is always something stirring on it. To-night it is a group of children. I can hear their shrill voices, and watch their frolicsome antics as they come running



down from the gate. Perhaps they have been in the woods all day, and are going home to dream fantastical dreams of such quaint birds as build in the wilds of Nod ; to hunt preposterous butterflies through enchanted forests of flowers ; and to roll down delicious drowsy mosses of slumber until to-morrow morning wakes them up with a shock at the bottom of the hill !

It is very happy for the little ones who live their young lives in the country. Amongst the blessed memories that survive when the world-weary spirit is gradually declining to its rest, none are more blessed, none more sweet, than memories of country-places and country-homes. I always like to hear my mother talk of her father's cottage with the great hill behind, and the sloping fields and beck in front ; the crowded flowers of the little garden, and the roses blowing in at the low lattices under the eaves where the swallows built summer after summer. She has not seen it for more than forty years—probably cottage, garden, roses, all are gone—but it will continue still a vivid picture in her mind's eye when many later times and scenes have faded into utter forgetfulness.

Do you remember that touching trait recorded

of old Alice in the story of Mary Barton? She has had a stroke, and is slowly dying in a murky Manchester dwelling; but her lost wits have gone astray on the sunny moors where she wandered heather-gathering with her play-mate sister fifty long years ago. The anguish and desolation of the bitter present are mercifully hidden from her. She sees the linnet's nest in the gorse-bush, and the bees turning homewards for the last time; or she is in church, next the wide-open door, and the sweet smell of the blossomed hawthorn tempts her away with Sally in chase after the first butterfly of the spring; or she lies crooning the old-world psalms that she learnt from her mother's voice and sang in the village-choir, when she was a village lass herself, and Manchester was only a dun cloud, unimagined and far away. And so she passes to her rest, like a tired child falling asleep, tended by visions of angels that were familiar faces once.

I have leisure to live and to think to-night. If reverie steal over me, conscience will not pluck at my sleeve, and bid me be up and doing; for my day's work is finished, and "the end of work is the enjoyment of leisure."

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All around me is suggestive of the pleasantness of simple pleasures. It is the echo of the even-song that the birds trill as they drop into their nests; it floats abroad on perfumy-gales from the garden-plots; it rises skyward on the smoke-wreaths of my neighbour's chimney over yonder in the orchard under the hill; it lurks between the leaves of my favourite books; it laughs at me out of the blue eyes of my four-footed friend lying plump, white, and cosy on the rug at my feet.

I revel not in change; variety has little charm for me. If I long for ambitious delights, they are beyond my reach; but I am grateful for the modest gifts fortune sells me at the price of a labour that I love; and my prayer to Heaven now and always is, that content and I may abide kindly together, and never shut our hearts against the pleasantness of simple pleasures.

Perhaps this pleasantness comes home to us most cordially by contrast with the greater expectations that have disappointed us. If it were always May, we should weary of placidness; but, remembering the wintry weather about Christmas-tide, we thank heaven for its calm, and earth for

its joyous beauty. Resentment, impatience, fretfulness must have gone over, and left us quiet, passive, waiting patiently for what God may please to give us next. We must have moaned our moan out; we must have cried from the depths of a wounded spirit, "Thy will be done!" and have begun dimly to perceive how our hard loss is being transmuted into gain; and so the grievous ache being spent, and the dazzle of delusive dreams faded from before our eyes, a new and purer vision may come to us. If we have been worsted once, that is not to say we are dead beat for ever; if we staked our *best* on the first throw, we did not stake our *all*. Discouragement may prostrate us for a season, but the strong, healthy mind puts it presently by; and as for despair, so many, so various, so sudden are the mutations of fortune, that while there is life there is always hope.

I sympathise profoundly with the young who rebel against the tedium of a dull life. It is waste breath to tell them there is no new thing under the sun, and that all things old are vanity and vexation of spirit. *They*, at least, are new, and have an instinctive wisdom which preserves them from the folly of taking even truth on hearsay.

It keeps the world going that they should prove it for themselves.

And still more than the young, whose chances are all before them, I pity those from whom time is slipping imperceptibly away — unmarked its course, undated the lapse of its vacant years. If they be restless and expectant, what marvel? Life appeared once a mighty important matter, and thus far it has been a mere languid vegetation; they cannot resign themselves yet to believe that this is all. Vicissitude is less hard to bear than a dead level of monotony.

Nothing settles men and women so effectually as a spell of keen personal joy, or, failing that, a rough tussle with fortune on their own account. After either of these experiments, they commonly turn to every-day work tolerably satisfied. They have had their share in the game, and are henceforward willing to stand by as onlookers; if they have gotten nothing else in it, they have at all events gotten knowledge; and if there be any genial sun in their tempers, they will be the ripper and the wiser for it.

Imagination magnifies the outward means and appliances of felicity, covets them, often strains

after them madly, when all the while its germs are in the soul. Neither good nor evil need we seek out of ourselves. Faith, hope, love, which are born in the hearts of all of us, are the seeds of real happiness—they and they only. No flowers or fruits save such as grow of them can we carry out of the world with us. The angels look to this harvest, and gather and glean it for the garner of God; but everything of our own sowing and reaping, whether it be money, or fame, or power, or science, or estate, we must put off with our worn-out shoes, and leave behind us—earth to earth, dust to dust, ashes to ashes!

Sages of all times and all creeds have preached this truth again and yet again; but the world grows old, and as little heed as ever pays the throng, still struggling on its vain-glorious and vain-toilsome way in pursuit of bliss. It is not until we begin to weary that we begin to philosophise; and good it is that we should earn our wisdom at the common price of experience. “Wit’s naught till it’s dear bought,” saith the adage. What we have paid for in tears, and blood, and sweat we value; it is precious; our very own—the only wisdom properly our own.

We have each our own notions of what are simple pleasures; but I am thinking now of such as are free to all healthy and cultivated minds—natural beauty, books, chosen-work, and leisure; things that demand few or none of the favours of Fortune—that are, perhaps, most kindly appreciated where she has been shy of her smiles. Round about a single field, or a home that you have earned and made, gather innumerable little personal interests that bring as full a satisfaction to the mind as centres in the great patrimony of the heir of a long line. On the slowly-accumulated shelf of books stand select, familiar friends, the acquisition of each one of which was a distinct joy not known to the possessor of inherited generations of libraries.

In his "Essay on Old China," Charles Lamb proves by the lips of his cousin Bridget in their better days the pleasures of being poor—comparatively, of course. "A thing was worth buying then, when we felt the money we paid for it," says she. "A purchase is but a purchase now that you have money enough and to spare. Formerly it was a triumph." I like this Essay of Elia's the best in

the whole delicious volume. It comes home with a hundred tender touches to my heart. It is impossible that a person born rich should appreciate it. It is for people who have whims and tastes; who believe in the pleasantness of simple pleasures; who know what they like, and why they like it; who have achieved the difficult determination of being happy as far as possible in their own way; who live their lives, not according to their neighbours, or according to the world in general, but according to themselves.

“Nature nous a estrenez d’une large facultez à nous entretenir à part; et nous y appelle souvent, pour nous apprendre que nous nous devons en partie à la société, mais en la meilleure partie à nous,” says Montaigne, uttering the philosophy evolved out of his own experience; but to watch the popular manias of imitation, and the voluntary bondages with which in this generation millions complacently throttle themselves, one might think she had abandoned the task of original conception, and taken to doing her work on the strictest geometrical principles.

Philosophers have never yet been able to prescribe any common road to mundane felicity; and



if we are not pleased to follow the beaten tracks that often lead no-whither unless it be to the haunts of infinite weariness and disappointment, we must strike out independent by-ways for ourselves. Necessity and Circumstance marshal most of us straight forward on the main route during the heat of the day, but they do not forbid evening saunterings, or the cultivation of hobbies, or resting-places a little way out of the dust and the throng; and the great difference amongst us is whether we will take advantage of such opportunities, or whether we will pass them by ungraciously as not worthy of our acceptance. If we could only believe it, we have plenty of leisure to stay and enjoy. We may make haste, but we shall not for that have the sooner done. We may go stumbling over the stones and trampling over the flowers, but we shall not get to the end of the journey any the earlier—even if we wished to be there; which most of us do not. We have all a goal short of the final one. I do not say this is unwise; but considering how rarely the goal is reached, or when reached, proves itself the haven of rest and bliss we hoped, it is surely unwise to look to the *end* only and never to the *way*. We

cannot be young twice ; we cannot turn upon our steps and go back to gather the garlands we left hanging on the trees ten years ago ; and therefore, with a gaze ever on the Cross upon the Distant Hills, and a remembrance always of the Shadow-land that lies beyond, let us endeavour to be contented with the passing day of small things, and to make ourselves happy in the pleasantness of simple pleasures.

The last glimmer of sun is gone ; gold and scarlet have faded into gray ; the sky, the downs, the trees are all mysteriously blended into twilight shades. Close the curtains and shut out the gloom, while

“The cares that infest the day,  
Fold their tents, like the Arabs,  
And as silently steal away.”





# OLD FAMILIAR FACES — OLD FAMILIAR PLACES.

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“La vie n'est de soy ny bien ny mal ; c'est la place du bien et du mal selon que vous la leur faictes.”—MONTAIGNE.





## I.

### CROWSFEET.

**I**F we want to know how Time flies or to count the crowsfeet he has been printing imperceptibly on the visage of our lives, it is good to go back after the lapse of a dozen years or so to the scenes where we were young; to look at the old familiar faces and the old familiar places—if there be any left—and by the faded changes that have passed upon them we shall see distinctly reflected the changes that have passed upon ourselves. Without some such contact with the past at certain epochs of our lives, we are apt to forget that the wheel is going round with us day by day, and grinding us older at every turn; especially we are apt to forget if we have received the Gods'-gift of cheerfulness which is a moral sunshine, or of hope which is a perpetual rejuvenescence.

I had almost forgotten it myself until to-day,

when loitering through the streets of the city where I was born, I found my eyes suddenly transfixed before one of those living mirrors, across which trooped as in a vision the shadows of ever so many years. It was a woman with a sallow, brunette face and grizzled hair, who was standing at the door of an old-fashioned chemist's shop, in the window of which stood the pot of leeches and the coloured glass globes exactly as they have stood this quarter of a century and more. She looked up the street and down the street, not as though watching for any comer, but vaguely and vacantly, as if the tedium that was wearing away the slow afternoon had crushed all the vivacity of life and thought out of her with its dead-weight. As I drew nearer she turned indoors, but paused and gazed straight at me when my eyes met hers.

Ah, what a story in that well-known face! We recognised each other, but we did not speak—our families were not acquainted, and we never spoke in our lives; but as her tired dark eyes receded mournfully before mine, I can fancy that she remembered as vividly as I did myself the days when we were sixteen, and near neighbours at the

parish church. She was a very handsome girl then, and a girl of high romantic notions, as certain of her sober kinsfolk used to say with much foreboding and reproach; but nothing, it seems, came of either the beauty or the romance; for there she is,—faded into as grave and gray a spinsterhood as one of themselves; but it is a good face still—ininitely patient though worn and weary. Of what has chanced between then and now nothing know I, nothing shall I seek to know. What I said to myself as I passed on was, “We are neither of us so young as we have been!”

Not so young as we have been—undeniably growing old, in fact; and yet perhaps not altogether regretful, not altogether sorry or sad to feel years and dulness creeping on; for, talk of rubbing the guilt off the ginger-bread! how many of us get the gingerbread minus the guilt? or, having got it, find it free from toothaches? Neither of us two, I warrant!

Every stone of the ancient streets in this quarter of the city is as familiar to me as my own face. There are the dim, overhanging houses, with their peaked gables, and dusky, wide-latticed windows,



untouched yet by the profane finger of modern improvement. Luckily for the picturesque, progress is very slow in these quiet country places. Here is the book-shop at the corner with its projecting panes walled-up, as of old, with a queer miscellaneous literature ; and the self-same master behind the self-same notched counter as I remember more years ago than I care to count. Time has stood still with him ; he was withered then —withered as a dry winter apple—and all the summers since have not mellowed him. He has on the identical suit of rusty black clothes, the yellow wisp of neckerchief, and the tarnished spectacles that he wore on that memorable day of my youth when, after long hesitation, I ventured into his den to inquire the price of a tawny volume, the romantic title of which had tantalised my curiosity until it was no longer to be borne. He eyed me with grim severity, and said—The book was not to sell. And yet it must have been to sell, for it is not there now ; I have looked most carefully. There is a portrait of Tate Wilkinson, dedicated to Mrs Siddons, and another of Van Goyen, his wife and child, and also one of Martin Rychart ; there are some quaint etchings

of the Minster adjacent, and of various antiquities in the old city besides, all very yellow and dusty; and amongst the books and pamphlets, I see Culpepper's "Complete Herbal," "Phædra and Hippolytus," "The Cook's Oracle," "The Man of the Mode," "The Sign of the Prophet Jonah," "Amphytrion; or, The Two Sosias," "London Melodies," "False Appearances," and a "New Game of Nipatitwitch the Bellman," interspersed with numerous Sermons, Law-books, and volumes of Architectural Plates; but no "Knights of the Swan."

Twenty years hence—nay, a hundred years hence—I believe the old man and his old books will be there still, fossilised and cobwebby, unless the gradual besom of destruction come round this way, and sweep the ancient shop—roof, walls, and foundations—from the face of the earth. There is a sound of falling timbers and a cloud of brick-dust but a little way off, and the quaint houses that used to cluster round the Minster, like humble penitents round the feet of a priest, are disappearing fast. How many are gone within my memory! And how many more have their doom written on their sordid walls and begrimed windows, and wait only until their hour comes!

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There are three large houses still left on the east side of the Minster that might be haunted, from the hopeless, haggard melancholy of their desolate aspect. And I have no doubt they are haunted. It is always chill and gloomy round there; the old people who lived in them are dead, and no younger generation has chosen to eclipse its chance of sunshine by tenanting them since. But a little further on, the lilacs and laburnums are nodding over the walls and railings of the secluded dwellings where ecclesiastical dignity still delights to abide, and the masons are at work, restoring fretted pinnacle and buttress, and moving round the holy walls as Time the destroyer moves, and replacing what he has crumbled away.

The Dean's garden is green in the youth of summer, and a children's playground now just as it used to be. There are the ruinous arches of the old palace, but the seats that were under them they have taken away; and there are the cool library-steps where many a sunny noon I have learnt my bits of lessons; and there at the lodge-gate is the identical fat woman in frousy black, who always looked as if resenting a personal injury fresh in

her feelings—a sour woman, and mysteriously terrible from some great and unknown calamity that had befallen her before the memory of little scholars.

The besom of destruction! It has been here with a vengeance, and has swept down the whole side of one familiar street. Gone is Dutton's bunshop; gone is the brazier's at the corner; gone is the ancient Shakspeare Tavern where the players met; and gone, too, are many familiar faces along with them.

So—I have come round the Minster, and will enter at the wide-open south door. This only of the old town never changes, never grows out of date, never puts on an aspect of poverty or desolation. Pillar, and airy arch, and gemmed window are the same. There glow the rainbow-tints on the warm stone, and high in the sun-moated roof float the dreams and ghosts of days that will ever fill it with the dim, poetic life of memory and fancy. It is not yet the hour of prayer, and a few curious sight-seers are straggling over the vast building—how vast, how empty! I look along the clustered pillars, and an evasive shadow slips from each to each, its outline melting into gray vague-

ness. Memory feels after it and cannot retain it. It is the shadow of Long Ago—the pale, beautiful belief in other shadows which have faded one by one into the crypt whither retreat the hopes that are never to come true; the trusts that collapse and die when they are put to proof; and the disappointments which, sad corpses for an hour, are ever after angels of mercy and patience that guide us on our way towards the peace of God.

Strikes the old clock!—rings the old prayer-bell! But the comers are a new generation. I know none of these sober, priestly faces; and the fat old vergers, who might have been canons in adversity, are all departed. The present office-holders look dapper and assured; they wear their black gowns and carry their silver pokers with a janty air; no dignity about them—no proud sense of responsibility, no identification of spirit with the grand old House they have to guard. I should not be surprised if they were caught on a cold day indulging in a game at leap-frog to warm themselves, or even condescending to marbles with the choristers. I follow the stragglers into the choir, and hear the prayers and the anthem, and endeavour to reproduce in my

imagination certain bright pictures out of the past. But I cannot do it. Thought will not be compelled. I gaze up at the gorgeous east window, a wonder of the world, and see only a confused mingling of brilliant hues; the galleries are blank; the long aisles hollow, echoless. The gloomy grandeur and solemnity of the place oppress me to-day. I long to be out on some open hill-side, with free air and sunshine around me. I cannot breathe here—the atmosphere is full of dust and memories of death.

Down to the river-side, the slow, sluggish river winding through the meadow levels. This used to be a pretty country-walk once, where we could pick buttercups and daisies and sweet maythorn in the hedges. But now it is a public promenade, gravelled and dusty, and screened from the pleasant fields by a high black paling. A great house with a tower has sprung upon the site of the little Inn at the Scope, and wealthy respectability has displaced rural seclusion.

But the walk across the fields beyond the river to the pretty village, two miles away, where my old nurse lived—the fields with the violet banks so sweet and so profuse—surely I shall find that the

same? No; the railway has cut up the fields, and the violets will bloom no more where there are only cinders and iron-roads, instead of grass and shady hedgerows. The last time I was in these fields was to gather violets for the coffin of a teacher who had died at school; where they buried her was then a dreary wilderness of a new cemetery;—it seems now more populous in once familiar names than the old places are in friends familiar.

Sentiment hovers fondly over the past; imagination glorifies it; and yet, when all is said, there is a bitter flavour of sadness in revisiting the scenes where we were young. Our place knows us no more. There is a look of strangeness in the kindest faces; they are not quite the same to us, and we feel a chilling suspicion that we are no longer quite the same to them. Those alone in whom we find no change are they who have passed beyond our mortal ken for ever. The pictures of the dead keep their familiar features; the eyes shine on us, the lips smile on us, the remembered voices lovingly caress our ears. When we meet indifference and forgetfulness where we once found cordial sympathy, in our anger at the falling away, we think

that some other friend whose love the grave has sealed would not have failed us thus ; and so we thrust many a thorn into our hearts that ought not to have pricked us skin-deep.

We make our disappointments by being too exacting. We forget how the rush of time has brought with it the rush of new interests, new pleasures, new cares in which we have no longer any part. A few hours' revival of the pleasant reminiscences and sentiments of early days will not bridge the gulf of years of separation. The cherished friendship is not weakened or lost, but it is further away from us ; we have out-run it ; we have suffered the wear and tear of life, and it has not kept pace with us. The habit of familiar usage is gone ; fortune has ruled that we shall not walk together any more for mutual help and consolation, and when we meet in the cross-ways of the world by chance, it is but for a grasp of the hand in passing, a momentary glimpse of a beloved face, a thrill of painful pleasure and surprise, a little backward looking of regret, and the crowd comes in again between. Henceforth we are nearer in spirit and in memory than we can ever be again in the aid and comfort of friendship and good-fellowship.



We are not so much changed as things are changed with us;—why should there be any reproach? The past is past. If it has left a bright picture in our mind-gallery, is it wise to draw before it a veil of futile tears because we cannot reproduce its reality in the present? Rather let us keep it as it was. We shall say all our life long, and believe it too, that the best picture we possess is *that* picture; that the dearest friends we ever knew were the early friends with whom on this earth we shall walk no more.

It is an every-day world, and for every-day service we need something stronger to hold by than a mere shadowy sentiment. Disappointment is inevitable if we will demand of things whose very essence is change that they should remain always the same. For friends to have known each other's struggles and defeats, sorrows and wearinesses; to have sympathised in each other's hopes and successes, to have grown together in mind and experience since the young time, and to be working together still in the mid-years of life, is the sure bond that does not break; that bears a strain and loses none of its elasticity; and because it has

been knit slowly, and lengthened year by year, is worn easily as a tie of blood.

Youth is not invariably a time of sunshine and pleasantness; to many it has been a March-wind-bitten season, garnished with the palest, scantiest flowers, which they would not live over again for all the world. I do not like to hear children, fretting in their little trials, admonished that these are their happiest days, and that the future will give them worthier cause for tears. God knows it is not true! The pains and persecutions of some of these tender souls pass like a blight upon them, and are remembered through a lifetime with resentment and distress. No such vehement sense of injustice ever assails them in maturity, as that against which they vainly revolted when obedience was the standard virtue. Ah, what weary grinding in the same mill of weak and strong have I not seen! What clouding of bright fancies as though they were sins, what sarcastic nipping of holy thoughts in the bud, what cruel wrenching awry of the God-given powers of brain and hand! And, alas, what thistle-crops where good grain might have sprung; what weeds and tares amongst the

harvest of us all—self-sown some, but more sown of others' carelessness and wrong!

No, it is not true that all the world leaves youth behind reluctantly. Many of us can float quietly down the river of life, and thank Heaven we have done with the vexed turmoil of its earlier voyage, and are being guided into fair haven and safe anchorage without any more struggle or effort of our own. A few of us may be prosperous, but so many of the independent little cock-boats, freighted with nothing better than drift and broken shells, get swamped directly the current catches them, that a good providence had need ply old safety hulks on the stream unceasingly to pick up their half-drowned crews; and grant that we all start fair in a craft of our own, more or less sea-worthy. I think it is amongst these miscellaneous folks rescued from the tangle of their sinking schemes, that we shall most of us ultimately be found. Some that set forth confidently, and unfurled their sails to the wind with the best hopes, have been run aground on the shoals of calamity long ago; while others who had but a plank to float them, or a poor raft bound together by their own endeavours, have met lucky eddies in the mid-stream,

and are sailing triumphantly out of sight of those less skilful or less favoured navigators who had them at such an advantage at their starting.

Nothing more puzzling than the successes and failures we see amongst those who were young with us! Here one of whom the kindest and most sanguine prophesied no good, thriving and honourable; there another with fine chances and every gale to favour, struggling against hope or utterly wrecked and broken up. Oh, the great mystery of Life!





## II.

### TO AND FRO THE OLD WALKS.

**B**EYOND the eastern suburb of the city there used formerly to be a favourite walk across what were called the Grove-Fields. The shortest way thither was down a narrow lane between the high brick-walls of what, I believe, were chiefly gardens. But about mid-way the right-hand side was a heavy arched door, which was always kept locked ; for a graveyard lay within. It was the graveyard belonging to our parish church, and I knew that my father was buried there. I had no remembrance of him, but I could not pass the low door without calling to mind that he lay mouldering in that dark, dismal, weedy enclosure. I never entered it but once, and that must be fully five-and-twenty years ago ; but I can see at this moment the blackened walls and the greened stone carved with my father's name, and

the forlorn wet grass waving up against it. A little child had been buried there that morning in the rain, and the rusty old sexton was smoking a pipe as he filled up the grave ; while a woman stood on the mossed steps of the chapel gossiping with him, and folding up something black with white edges—the covering, I suppose now, of the tressels on which the coffin had rested. They have ceased to use the old graveyard at last, and not too soon ; it was an encumbered, ghastly place, where none would willingly leave the sacred dust of kin or friend beloved.

From this narrow lane, haunted by the dark mystery of death, we entered on a large meadow, through which ran a flagged pathway ; then on an unkempt road in the rear of one of those terraces of small houses which everywhere radiate from the suburbs of our country towns. Passing along this road one summer afternoon, now many years ago, I came unexpectedly upon a pair of lovers, standing by an open garden-door, who were too much absorbed in the sorrow of parting, which appeared to be their case, to heed me. The girl's head was uncovered, and her hair hung in loose curls about a fair face, much freckled, but very

pleasing. She was weeping in uncontrolled distress, and her companion seemed almost at his wits' end how to comfort her. I passed swiftly out of their way, weaving a romance for them of the mingled yarn of many novels I had read. With him I afterwards grew quite familiar by sight, but her I never saw again until yesterday, when I met them together, marching along in serene conjugal dignity, two sturdy little men in knickerbockers going on in front. She was steering the smaller of them out of the kennel with her umbrella, and looked as pleasant and more freckled than formerly ; but there was none of the twilight of tears about her soft motherly eyes. It made my heart glad to see this good conclusion to their love-story, which I had so unintentionally surprised, and to know that they are married and, by all appearances, living happily ever afterwards, the fond, unconscious souls ! Fate has not dealt so kindly with some other couples that I can remember in their April courting-days, but has drifted them far asunder on separate roads, to be overtaken by Joy or Sorrow, as their luck may turn ; of Sorrow, mostly, I am afraid : for Joy seldom becomes hail-fellow with those who have first

met sour-visaged Disappointment and accepted him for company.

By a stile and a plank bridge over a deep ditch we formerly passed from the unkempt lane into the first of the sunny Grove-fields; but they are almost gone now—eaten up of bricks and mortar. There is a great workhouse built amongst them for the poor, and that pleasant walk is pleasant no longer. The wild-roses in the hedges and the trailing honeysuckles look dusty and athirst, and the gipsies have abandoned the bit of open common by the cross-roads beyond where they used to encamp when I was a child. This spot was the limit of many a ramble. It was very pretty with the tent under the high bank overhung with trees, and the kettle on cross-sticks over the fire which sent up a white smoke-wreath amongst the thick green. The black-haired men, scarlet-cloaked women, and tawny children grouped well under the summer sky, and I am not sure but that I thought their free life, with all this poetry and picturesqueness outside, infinitely to be preferred to mine, guided by formal rote and rule. It was the hope of finding the encampment still there that led my steps so far to-day; but the place was



quite silent, and the grass almost knee-deep. It was evident that no gipsy-kettle had been boiled there since this leafy spring came in.

I did not return by the way I had gone, but by the windmill in the lane, and there I saw no change. High hedges, tangled full of wild-roses and bind-weed bells gaily as of old, shut in the moist green lane, and the great sails were sweeping about with a cheery familiar sound in the southeasterly breeze, just as I had watched them do through the bars of the farm-gate in trembling admiration and awe when I was a child; for it was a nursery legend amongst us that if we disobediently ventured within the draught of those mighty whirling wings, they would catch us up and carry us round and grind us as small as the finest flour in the mill! I think this tragical scare-crow must have been the felicitous invention of our comely Bessie, who was a cheerful young woman and fond of company, which she sought in miscellaneous localities when she was supposed to be leading me into the green meadows to gather buttercups and daisies.

There was a deep porch to a certain very ancient house we often passed, on which she had conferred

the significant name of Kidnapper's Corner, impressing it upon my tender imagination that if ever I revealed the secret of her mysterious conferences, she would leave me in that fearsome hole to be carried off and eaten by the kidnapper who made it his nightly ambush. With this powerful motive for concealment I kept her counsel closely, and under her auspices I saw several phases of society to which, but for her, I might never have been introduced. I have no recollection of rebelling—perhaps I even found the variety charming. I like to see queer, out-of-the-way people still, and enjoy their company.

But what terrible memories children have! My eyes of wonder and observation must have been sometimes very wide open indeed for them to have conveyed to my mind scenes so vivid as yet remain imprinted upon it. I can recall one long dusty walk on a blazing afternoon down towards the Barbican, where we halted at a shabby house, and went up several flights of rotten stairs to an attic under the tiles. Here an old woman, very ugly to look at, was smoking her pipe over the empty grate, and Bessie set me up upon the window-seat, bidding me be quiet there, while they entered into

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conversation. I had no temptation to be otherwise than quiet in that sordid garret, where the floor was worm-eaten and broken, and the paint worn off the wood-work years and years ago. A ragged linnet, in a very forlorn and despondent mood, dozed fitfully on the perch of his cage, now and then interrupting with a rare chirp the low-toned talk of the wise woman and her credulous client. The old crone was in fact a fortune-teller. After some discussion, perhaps of the nature of bargaining, she laid by her pipe on the hob, and produced a pack of cards, which she spread abroad on the table, and then she began forthwith to unroll before Bessie's mental vision the shadowy web of the future. She was to be married of course, and she was to have thirteen children—*thirteen children*—each one of whom would probably give her as much trouble as my single self!

I do not remember a second visit to the frousy garret in the Barbican, but we went often to the workshop of a clumsy young cobbler, where I sat on the shop-board amongst the leather while Bessie and her cousin *sweethearted*, quarrelled and made it up again. They married ultimately, and the cobbler, bald and serious now, clouts the fa-

mily shoes for old acquaintance' sake. They have a very large family—eleven living, I believe—so the fortune-teller was not far wrong in her guess. I bear Bessie no grudge for breaches of duty now—quite the reverse, indeed; every little helps, whether rough or smooth, to make up the motley patchwork of early reminiscences, and the more various it is, the richer to review. The race of wise women is becoming extinct, and it is not everybody who has the opportunity of assisting at the courtship of a cobbler over his last. Let us each be thankful for our chances great and small, and not depreciate them to the exaltation of those distinguished openings which have been reserved for others more lucky than ourselves. The cobbler's favourite flower was the marigold, of which he had commonly a pot on his encumbered window-sill.

Another pleasant walk was on the city walls, from which, then as now, there was to be seen outward a sunny green expanse of level country, through which flowed the river leisurely; within were luxuriant gardens, where grew magnificent purple beeches, and orchards, which have all disap-

peared before the iron tramp of the railway. Passing through the great South Bar, we overlook still the monotonous seclusions of the Nunnery, with their straight paths and alleys and rows of tall trees, under which, on quiet summer evenings, the Sisters may be seen walking and meditating singly or in solemn pairs. I have watched them, poor souls, many a time, thinking they looked sadly like caged birds, and speculating on the mystery of their lives, hidden behind those prison-walls, until the gathering dimness made their black-shrouded figures undistinguishable in the surrounding gloom.

Perhaps I do not find them so much the objects of compassion now as then I did. Time disrobes our illusions of their dignity and beauty, and leaves them to us often poor indeed. I can understand the sweetness of rest and refuge to the broken heart; the infinite comfort of a shelter from the clamour of the world—of a final shelter whose vista stretches through an avenue of prayer to the gates of heaven. To lie down and be still; to be safe; to have done with fretting and moaning; to pour out the aching sin and sorrow into a sympathetic human heart that by its priestly consecra-

tion may console, direct, and pardon in the name of the Highest Mercy—this to some natures, warm, impulsive, pure, is as the very safety-valve of reason. Whether it be better to fly the turmoil, or to brace up the wounded spirit, and turn again to God's work in the open ways, is an individual question; we are not all alike, and what for some is good and healthy discipline might be to others as a daily renewal of the bitterness of death.

What incredible stories used to circulate amongst us when we were young about the enormous cruelties to soul and body that went on secretly in these nuns' houses! Surely it is a weak mistake to tell such falsities to children? When their thinking-time comes, and they begin to find out how their belief has been imposed upon, the generous-minded fling over truth and fables together, and overdo their sympathy and respect for the misrepresented creed and its professors. To be Turk, Jew, Infidel, was less desperate and unholy, according to those little lying books, than to belong to that great Christian Church which holds its doctrines by the interpretation of Rome. We were cozened into all manner of exaggerated and ignorant fancies respecting it, as gross in their way

as any of the artifices that were exposed and denounced. One jesuitry is as mischievous as the other, and comes to its inevitable issue amongst young, impetuous thinkers, in a forlorn rejection of all ready-made systems, and a seeking out of a new profession of faith for themselves. *Well*, if they seek it only in the holy text-book of Faith, Hope, and Charity, by which all Christians stand, whether they be ranged under Pope or Protester.

There is work enough in the world for all the preachers of the Good News of God, if they could but agree to differ on things immaterial; to be honest to each other; tender of traditional prejudices and modern vagaries; for they labour one and all in the name and service of the Divine Master who explicitly declared that he who was not against Him was for Him. In Bacon's Essay of "Unity in Religion" there is a pithy passage which, being well considered, might put a period to much vain argument and more unchristian scorn and malignant abuse:—"A man that is of judgement and understanding shall sometimes heare ignorant Men differ, and know well within himselfe that those which so differ meane one thing,

and yet they themselves would never agree. And if it come so to passe, in that distance of judgement which is betweene Man and Man; Shall wee not thinke that God above, that knows the Heart, doth not discerne that fraile Men, in some of their Contradictions, intend the same thing; and accepteth of both?"

Perhaps I shall be told that in religious matters liberality and indifference are convertible terms; but is that true, or is it a mere plausible fallacy and convenient mouth-stopper? Some persons are born into the world with an instinct of pure justice on which the sectarian spirit can never be grafted by any means; others have the germs of fanaticism, and are partisans from their very nature; but by far the greater number are made of that moral plasticity which is kneaded by education and circumstances into the common mould of common men, with a gentle inclination towards the liberal or the bigoted, determined by temperament and physical conditions most often.

From my earliest youth I remember a certain old gentleman who was then a painful puzzle to me. He was of a venerable and reverend appearance, and of the most rigid puritanism of behaviour.



A Sunday in his house was awful—a long-drawn penance of yawning over dreary sermons in the intervals between the services, and of rejoicing when bed-time came to lead the way to Monday morning. To him a theatre was as the gate of perdition; a dance as the swift, light measure towards it. The republic of letters, as he described it, was anything but a community of saints; and as for the players, they, alas! poor souls, were still in the gross darkness and libertinism of the Carolan era, when the Puritans rose up in righteous protest against the iniquities of the stage. He was good with his money, and kind to poor relatives exceedingly, but he had a mulish obstinacy of character which issued in a fatal tyranny, and made all about him subservient to his single will. Was any remonstrance raised by the household against his too severe rule, he would reply with invincible calmness, measuring his thumbs and twinkling his eyes as he did so, that he had laid the matter in dispute before the Lord, and *He* had decided it. What answer could be made to such a specious self-deception? Only a discontented murmuring that the Lord should be always on his side—always opposed to any

little innocent amusement on which the young folks' hearts were set. And what a vindictiveness of pious hatred could he cherish against any who offended him by resistance; what a travesty of Christian charity could he enact towards those who had not grace to be good in his peculiar way! He is gone to his rest now in peace, but not before he had found out the foolishness of attempting to be a harsh, special providence over the souls and instincts of his children. He had his sharp trials; the tight reins of his government broke in his hands more than once; some of those of his own household went the worst way to learn the vanities and vices of this wicked world from which he would have screened them, and gave him many a bitter heartache. He erred not because of his religion but in spite of it; systematically indulging a spirit of domination in the disguise of lawful authority; provoking his children to wrath and rebellion by the crushing of nature within them; taking the name of the Holiest in vain for the upholding of his own selfish, wanton will. And yet he was no hypocrite.

From the time I was able partially to solve the enigma of his character, I have been much inclined

to believe that the *manner* of men's piety depends on natural disposition as it may have been modified or aggravated by training and circumstances ; and to give them credit for sincerity in their religious profession, howsoever blurred and deformed it may be by human frailties. I think a *conscious* pious hypocrite is one of the rarest characters in the world—even more rare than a good Christian about whose consistency all are agreed.

And as with individuals, so perhaps is it with peoples and churches. The Romish system with its pomp and pageantry, its grotesque and tender appeals to credulous, florid imaginations, its safety-valves of confession and penance, its duty of good works, its holy refuges from the world, its bonds of obedience, fit it to the impulsive yet submissive races of the South. To the calm, temperate, independent Northern, the open field of Protestantism with its moderation and simplicity, its varieties of doctrine and discipline, and periodic revivals for the relief of enthusiasts, is better suited. But they all march alike under the one symbol of the Cross, and all pay fealty to one only Captain of their Salvation. What a victorious battle might they

not fight against heathendom if they would look to the glory and honour of their Leader and His Cause, instead of calling on a weary world to witness their prowess in petty skirmishes amongst themselves !





### III.

#### WHITSUNTIDE FAIR.

**I** WAS deep in the pages of a new book this morning when my attention was suddenly distracted by the piercing squeal of a penny-trumpet, supported by the rub-a-dub-dub of a sixpenny-drum, close below the windows. I looked out and saw that the street was busy with country-folks and holiday-children streaming to and fro, and then I remembered that this was the first day of Whitsuntide Fair. It used to be a great gala for us when we were young—an epoch anticipated with eagerness and looked back upon with regret. Eleven o'clock in the morning was our hour for setting off in trim white frocks and spencers, blue sashes, and best hats; Bessie being charged to lead us into no Shows, to put us in no whirligigs or swing-boats, and not to allow us any sweets but gingerbread. My impression is that

Bessie did her duty by us in these respects, and that she annually enriched me with a fairing in the shape of a rosy-cheeked apple carved of wood, which developed itself ultimately into a dutch tea-service, a spring-jack, or a quaking pith serpent. But the incidents by which the noisy scene is most indelibly fixed in my memory are of somewhat later date, and from then until to-day I could never again be prevailed on to enter it.

We had a young companion spending the holiday with us, and having made our usual matinal excursion into the Fair under proper guardianship we were supposed to have done with it, and in the afternoon were sent out—Isabel, my sister Trot, and myself—to amuse ourselves in the Museum Gardens, whither we were accustomed to go unattended. But no sooner were we well out of the sight of home than our visitor proposed to make a detour by certain obscure streets, through which we could regain the cheerful market-place and enjoy the forbidden pleasures of the Shows. I was not taken into the consultation, being still too young to do anything but obey my elders and betters; and by and by we emerged from the intricacies of back streets into the tumult of the

Fair at four o'clock, when the fun till then slow and respectable, began to wax fast and furious.

Isabel was a dauntless, enterprising spirit of thirteen or thereabouts, with a taste, I imagine, for highly-spiced horrors; for I remember nothing of how we wound our way through the throng until I felt myself being pressed up the steps of one of the Shows, and finally jammed into a corner by a barrel close against the drop-scene. This drop-scene represented a thatched building on a common under a big white moon; heavy, livid clouds were rolling away from the ghastly light, and the whole coarse picture was suffused with an atmosphere of dread. My sister and Isabel were somewhere in the crush, but I was quite separated from them; and a country clown, to make a little more space for his own boots, unceremoniously set me up upon the tub, where I felt myself for some moments a conspicuous object of derision. I was ashamed to cry, or it would have been a vast relief; but my elevation enabled me to discover the anxious countenance of Trot and the sharp curiosity of Isabel in the background, and that was a little comfort.

A considerable time elapsed before the scene

drew up; but when the place would not afford standing-room for any more spectators, it rose slowly, and revealed the awful locality of what the Showman described as the "Red-barn Murder." There was a young woman all in white lying upon the floor of the building depicted in the drop-scene, with a crimson stream flowing from her side, and a young man fleeing out by the doorway through which the broad moonlight poured in. That picture having been duly stared at and commented on aloud, was withdrawn, and a long series followed, of which I remember only two. The one was of the young man waking suddenly out of his sleep in the dead of the night to see the ghost of the hapless Maria whom he had murdered standing at the bed-side, dressed just as she was when he struck the cruel, cruel knife into her heart. The other shewed the murderer as he appeared after he was hanged, and had been cut down from the drop. Shall I ever forget that hideous, livid face, jerked on one side, which seemed the most popular and exciting part of the whole spectacle? It exercised a species of fascination over my gaze by its unimaginable strangeness and horror: it haunted my waking dreams for years—I can even see it now!



This picture closed the exhibition, but before the curiosity of the crowd was satiated a dangerous diversion ensued. A half drunken man, taller by the head than most of the people, who had pushed his way to the front pulled out a great clasp-knife and began to brandish it about, shouting and threatening like a maniac, though why or wherefore was to me from terror quite incomprehensible. Screaming women pressed to the door to escape, and there seemed every chance of a bloody tragedy being then and there enacted before our eyes, when two policemen entered, wrested the knife from the man's hand and hauled him, furious and struggling, down the steps.

I was paralysed with fear, and stood on my tub helpless until somebody lifted me off, and carried me out of the Show. I came to myself again standing on the wide pavement by the toy-stalls. My companions were lost, and what was still more grievous, my pretty fairings of the morning—the silver thimble I had bought though I hated stitch-work, the Paul Pry umbrella-bodkin-case, and the quaking pith serpent in his white box—were all gone out of my little pocket—stolen, most likely, in the crush. My deliverer was an old farming-

man in blue-ribbed worsted stockings and knee-breeches, with a face frightfully pitted by the small-pox ; but an angel could not have looked pleasanter to me than did he when he led me out of the Fair and through the streets towards my home. We were just in sight of it when my sister and Isabel overtook us, in a terrible fuss and anxiety. Isabel relieved her own feelings by vehemently scolding me for getting myself out of their way ; and at this moment I can recall the fume of indignation that rose in my heart, and almost lifted me off my feet, when I heard her unjust accusations.

I never would go to Whitsuntide Fair again as long as I was young ; but to-day I strolled through the crowd for old sake's sake, and fancied that it seemed neither so turbulent nor so rude as then. The stalls of toys, sweeties, and gingerbread were there as formerly, and the swings and the whirligigs ; but there was no giant, or giantess, or dwarf, or two-headed pig, or spotted lady ; neither was there any panoramic murder or wild-beast show. But there was a Circus under a tent, and a dramatic booth, on the outside stage of which the tinselled heroes and heroines were displaying their graces

to attract the crowd—but the crowd seemed disinclined to be attracted. And, in quite the modern taste, there was a target at which anybody, from a very limited distance, might take three shots for a penny and be sure of hitting the bull's eye once at least. But if the market-place was less tumultuous than five-and-twenty years ago, the other public places in the city were much more busy. The Minster was a quiet, moving crowd, and the Museum Gardens were full. The taste of the people is undergoing a change, and the change is clearly for the better.

But talking of tragedies, I once had a very narrow escape of witnessing an awful scene from the New Walk by the river where it looks towards the Castle. I was older then—come to the reasonable years of eleven or twelve, I suppose; for it was by permission that I now, on my way home from school, occasionally trotted down the steps by the bridge, and took a ramble under the shady elms which beautified the river-side beyond the staithe. It was a lovely, sunshiny morning, I remember, and the unusual number of boats on the water attracted me; so I parted with my companions, and

hanging my book-bag on my arm, went down the steps and strolled leisurely and pleasantly along.

It was on a Saturday when we left school early, and I had an hour before me, with no lessons to learn for the afternoon, which was a half-holiday; therefore I took my time, observing with some surprise that a continuous throng of people was trooping the same way as myself. Usually it was a deserted place so early in the day; but when I came in sight of the Castle I found my path barred by a densely-packed-crowd, who were not making a riotous noise as crowds commonly do. Their faces were all set in one direction, and some of the men stood with their hats off, the hindermost pressing forward, and many climbing the lower branches of the trees, but all with a hushed hurry, as it seemed, and an overawed patience. It was a great space that the people covered, yet you might have walked on their heads; and looking towards the Castle like the rest, I saw a strange black object before the little door in the wall which is always there with a brickwork platform below it. A bell was tolling somewhere, and I asked a woman who carried a baby in her arms what was the matter.

She told me that three young men were just going to be hanged !

If I had been borne on the wings of the wind I could not have fled faster than I did ; and as with shaking knees I began to climb the bridge-steps into the street the Minster Clock struck twelve, which I knew was the hour of doom. No horror in all my life is comparable to that horror, or perhaps ever can be. And the sun was shining in the blue heavens and on the river gloriously.

These solemn judicial tragedies are enacted still, and still on market-days at noon, to brutal crowds who make festival of their recurrence. I would leave the people their innocent amusements, and even give them many others that they have not, but I would fain see them deprived of this barbarous pleasure if Justice could any way be satisfied without making a holiday-spectacle of its righteous vengeance.



#### IV.

##### DUTCH PICTURES.

**O**NCE set afloat on the sea of old reminiscences it is peculiarly difficult to make land again in the sober, unromantic present. The past is full to overflowing with motley trivialities, which here, in their familiar places, I cannot help recalling. Half-forgotten faces look at me out of the mist, and immediately a whole scene reproduces itself with the quaint fidelity and naturalness of a Dutch Picture.

Here is an ancient-fashioned, up-stairs parlour, with a very uneven floor, big chairs and sofa covered in black hair-cloth, and a rigid tapestry-work settee between the windows that is full of back-aches for unwary occupants. In the arm-chair by the fire is a handsome old lady in a perfect tower of a cap, composed of stiff bows of satin and broad frills of lace. A white net kerchief in

many folds envelops her throat and bosom, and affords a soft resting-place for her cosy double chin. Her dress is black silk without a wrinkle or a rustle in it ; her apron embroidered muslin, on which her hands gently lie as she sits with her spectacles by her on her open, large-printed Bible ; she is talking to a small child at the table who has a big bag of ends of wool in her lap which she is patiently sorting out into shades and colours, and laying in rainbow lines upon the cloth. There is a very pleasant understanding between the two. The child is not usually so docile ; she prefers a rambling walk, or slide, or game with her brother, or a fantastic romance in a corner, to propriety in a prim parlour and the exercise of the domestic virtues. But the atmosphere of this place is tranquil and composing ; it suits her to listen to the old-world stories of the ancient lady ; and especially it suits her to be told that she is good, for that is news as rare as it is gratifying.

Then in comes a middle-aged daughter with an armful of starched muslins and laces, fresh and crisp from the ironing-board down-stairs ; and the child is called away from sorting the brilliant ends to do a bit of fine darning in collar or frill because

her eyes are the youngest; and she accomplishes the task deftly and with satisfaction. By and by in the twilight appears tea, and with it another daughter, who understands Latin, and the partner in the druggist's shop below, which she governs as mistress; and the child is in great favour and glory amongst the elder folks, and is encouraged to chatter and never snubbed. And after tea she is invited down to spend half an hour behind the cheerful gas-lit counter, puzzling over the queer names on the bottles, and witnessing the mysteries of pill-making and plaster-spreading; to be finally regaled with a nice cough lozenge, and dismissed up-stairs to partake of seed-cake and currant-wine before going home to bed.

In that quiet, orderly, unpicturesque house the little maiden has spent a happy half-holiday. She will spend there many another, and it is a sad day for her when the dear, dear old lady's face is disgarnished of its tower-cap, and laid down meekly in its coffin.

And here is another picture out of Shadowland—a room looking towards the Minster that is full of little scholars. The mistress is a stately lady in



purple merino, with tier above tier of cannon-curls on either side of her pale and handsome face. She is hearing the Monday-morning lessons, all the children, small and great, standing round her in a semi-circle of twenty or more. The Church Catechism is in progress, and the young tongues, for the most part, go glibly through it; but nearly at the bottom of the class there is a poor little body who is standing on one leg in an agony of nervousness; for she has counted heads and reckoned that the hardest bit of all—the “I desire,” as the scholars call it—will come to her.

Question and answer, question and answer, bring the lesson down to her neighbour on her upper hand; by this time her head is dizzy, her poor little heart is in her throat, and the tears are swimming in her eyes, until the fine pale face and cannon-curls, and rich purple dress are all floating about in infinite space and dazzledom. When her turn comes, she sobs out the two fatal words and breaks down; is prompted by the mistress, by the little scholars on either hand, but cannot manage it at all, and bursts out weeping; to be pronounced naughty, contumacious, obstinate, and worse than ever; to be seated up upon the ignominious *stand*

with a bump that jars through her spinal memory to this day. And the lessons go on without her—collect, epistle, gospel—and she stays on the perch of disgrace, gradually recovering her senses, hardening herself and making herself resigned that the extremity is over; she has suffered the utmost penalty of the law, and is the wickedest child that ever was born, but it cannot be helped. And by and by the cannon-curls in unimpeachable order advance formally towards her, and the solemn interrogation is put,—Will she be a better girl next time? And she faithfully promises to try, but all the same feels truly thankful that the next time is seven days off.

And here is another school-scene on breaking-up-day—prize-day. The accumulation of lessons is done with, and the busy bees are humming in clusters over the issue of the grand examination. Luckless body is for once in high feather. Every month she has stood first in her class; every month she has carried off the President Card; and the five ornamental bits of pasteboard were only transferred from her own desk yesterday to the pious hands of her chief mistress. She has no doubt of her

success. Every body knows she has won ; every body knew a month ago that she *must* win ; for she had gained so much start of her only rival who ever had a chance that it was next to impossible she could be overtaken. And they speculate on what the prizes will be—luckless body secretly hoping that hers will not turn out “The Course of Time,” or “Hervey’s Meditations.” She needs not afflict her soul with any such anticipation—she has drawn nothing but a blank.

Enter the chief mistress and her subordinates with the gay volumes decked in morocco and silk, neatly set up upon a tray. Luckless body’s heart beats a little faster as the great girls receive their testimonials of merit, and retire smiling and elated to compare them. The turn of the second-class arrives, and a name is called—not *her* name but her rival’s. The child looks more surprised than gratified as a smart book is put into her hand with an encomium on her diligence, attention, and many scholastic virtues. Luckless body waits in wonder—pale, too wroth to shed a tear in such a cause—until all the prizes are adjudged ; when she is solemnly informed that though by numbers she had won the race, yet she is so conspicuously defi-

cient in arithmetic, French phrases, and celestial globe, that it would have been impossible and positively wrong to promote her above a school-fellow who had attained to such uniform excellence in all her studies. Her rival, an honest, plodding lassie, holds the trophy at arm's length, and proclaims in the face of all the assembly that she does not care to have it; but luckless body thrusts it back upon her, and says contemptuously: "Take it—I'll never try for another prize as long as I live!"

And so she retreats in a wicked, sarcastic humour, and hides her humiliated head in her book-box, and wonders in her ignorant heart whether it has anything to do with prizes that her rival has a wealthy father who sends her to school on a pony, and she has none at all—only an anxious, good mother, and a home where work and care have gone hand in hand for many and many a year. She cannot make it out satisfactorily at all; but henceforward she revolts against injustice and hates pious phraseology; and her sympathy flows always with those in the world who labour and don't win—who strain for the prizes and carry off the blanks!

And here is a last school-vision, some years later. It is the dawn of a September morning, and all the household is still abed except the half-boarder, who is creeping softly down to the music-room to do her day's practising before anybody else is astir. At six o'clock she makes a tour of the rooms and calls girls and teachers, and for the next hour she is a nursemaid—washing, brushing, and dressing the little ones. At seven she descends again to the piano, to hear beginners strum through half an hour each; and so on through seven monotonous half-hours, with intervals for prayers and breakfast. A little before twelve she reappears in the school-room to hear lessons until lunch arrives, when she munches her crust, hovering about amongst her undone duties with an uneasy sense of being behindhand and quite unable to keep ahead of time. Then to a detested frame of Berlin-wool work, where she gets a stitch in her side with two hours of toiling at lilies and roses on an ottoman for her mistress's drawing-room. Then a rush to dress her young charges and put on her own bonnet for a walk and the one happiness of her day in a stroll down by the

river arm-in-arm with her favourite friend. Home to dinner, and immediately in the mill again, correcting dictations and exercises with casual help from kind-hearted first-class girls, given against rule ; and when all is done for others, a scrap of paper and a pencil in the twilight to compose her own *subject* for the week ; an imperfect recitation of lessons she has had no time to learn ; a lecture for setting a bad example ; a vehement denunciation of her negligence and idleness ; then a flush on her face, a sparkle in her eyes, and a stinging repartee on her tongue.

Poor young rebel, not broken in yet ! She will never get on in the world—never ! Born to work for her bread, yet proud as if Providence had made her independent. What is to become of her ?—where does she expect to go to ? She does not know, and she does not much care ; she is almost disheartened about her prospects herself. But that some of her companions love her in spite of all—love her very fondly and very faithfully—it would go hard with her.

At last come a few quieter days, partings, good-byes, even a “ God bless you ! ” from her severest task-mistress, though in a despondent tone, as if

it was hardly likely that He would ; and the luckless body goes abroad into the world to fight her battle of life as best she can. And strangest issue—the so-called evil dispositions of her youth,—her pride, obstinacy, and defiance—become her very helps and safeguards in the struggle. Perhaps after all God foresees where the pinch will come, and ruling nature, gives to each of us the weapons of which we shall stand in sorest need.

And the dear old friends of those troublesome days are friends still. She never meets the face of one of them that does not greet her with a smile and some reminiscence of kindness. The sharp discipline and hard labour were good for her—good for her in this if in naught else, that every yoke has been a feather-weight, and all work play-work by comparison ever since. And Grey Lady who bade God bless her ! God bless you wherever you be ! Your prayer followed her, faint though it was, and follows her still. Do you hear her speaking, or are you out of reach of a message flung through the dark ? If you hear her, answer !

This is the old French Master's house—who is at home in it now, I wonder ? I used to be familiar

with those bookish little rooms—friends with his children, who are all scattered and gone years ago.

There is his grave, and his darling Vic's close by it, in the quiet churchyard behind the arches of the Abbey—turfed greenly over, but to-day all white and daisied with the spring.

What a bright, bright face it was, that face of Vic's, which just faded and faded, and died away from the sun in the very prime of the morning!

Here is a picture of a brilliant August day out of doors; but in the professor's study all is grave and quiet, and the long table is cleared for the incoming class. There is sturdy little Fan, just on a comfortable level with her books; and pretty Vic, who has attained to the dignity of helping her father, seated with her back against the light, and the roses of her cheeks all in full glow under the shadow of the dark grape-clusters of her richly-tinted hair. She rests her elbows on the big dictionary, and props her dimpled chin in the palms of her wee white hands, on one finger of which gleams an emerald ring—symbol that her heart is given away and her maiden promise plighted already.

The door opens, and two scholars enter with



mysterious air and abrupt news. "There's a wedding at St Olave's this morning—have you heard of it, Vic?" cries one. "We always thought you and Willy were engaged—did you really break off when you quarrelled? We none of us knew he was going to be married. He has stolen a march upon all his friends—and it *is* that widow! I shall always say he has gone round the wood and round the wood, and taken up with the crooked stick at last! She has nothing but her money. I wouldn't care if I were you, Vic; he was never worth caring about!" And then the chatterer subsides into a frightened silence, for out of Vic's face die away the roses and the sunshine, as if the hand of Death had passed over it and turned it to clay. Not a word breathes from her white lips; they only stir with a dumb fluttering pathos, while a blank glaze steals over her beaming hazel eyes and quenches their lustre for ever.

No one ever saw Vic smile again.

She does not help her father that morning, and he is a little testy over our lessons; he will have the window shut, sultry as it is; for we can hear the wedding-bells ringing at St Olave's while we are gathered at our work. Her mother has told

him hurriedly Vic is not well, and he must do without her; and he is fidgety and fretful that anything should ail his darling, and he not know why. He will know why soon enough—soon enough!

And this is a day in the Fall of the Leaf. The chill October winds have begun to blow, and Vic is sitting by our parlour fire at home talking to my eldest sister very seriously and sadly—myself listening with an awed, silent sympathy to the old, old story she is telling;—I fancy I can hear her still! “Yes, they had quarrelled, but they had made it up again, and she thought it was over—he kissed her the last time they said good-by—they were quite friends—oh, yes, quite friends! She had no more idea of his leaving her, and marrying anybody else, than she had of the Minster falling! Her grief will kill her, *is* killing her—her heart is broken,” she says; speaking, not in her old, sweet voice, but in such a querulous, sharp accent as might thrill from the chords of some fine instrument when overworn and jarred all out of tune.

She had her pretty caprices in her happy days, and perhaps by practical people she may be con-

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sidered a little fantastic and sentimental now ; but by and by every adverse tongue is hushed, for it begins to be whispered amongst us that she is going off in a decline. And before the snow-drops come again she is gone !

And here is the good old Master's study again, but wearing a festive air. Poor Vic has vanished, and he has vanished, and in the broad bay-window stands sturdy little Fan, who has been the stay and support of her mother's house ever since that dismal hour when her father, without a moment's warning, stricken by sudden death, departed to the bourne whence no traveller returns.

The New-Year's morning sun ripples in and out of the shining folds of her bridal array ; and she looks the promise of the future bravely in the face, though with nothing to her fortune but youth, health, and courage, she has just come back from St Olave's wedded to a lover no more richly endowed than herself.

It is not a very splendid occasion. There is her mother, serene and satisfied ; there is her young brother whom she has fitted and armed for the work of life ; and there is myself as bridesmaid,

with a touch of antiquity in my attire ; for once before the constant pair had been on the point of achieving the fulfilment of their hopes when death stepped in and brought delay ; so I laid up my gay gown in lavender, with a vow to wear it at their wedding yet, though I should have ten years to wait, and look like one of Noah's kinswomen come out of the ark at last !

Fan's bridal face, familiar for twenty years, became strange to me from that day forth. But passing by the old-fashioned house yesterday, I remembered that sparkling, frosty winter's morning, and the two who then went over the threshold together with all the world before them ; ready to take its work in earnest and to make the best and happiest of their simple lot. And thus far there has been no echo of minor in their marriage-bells, save once the sacred hymn of angel-voices thrilling round the cradle of a child.

I can look round this queer old panelled parlour where I write, and put back the hands on the dial of time for nearly thirty years. Nothing is altered here since I remember it. If the carpet has worn-out, it has been replaced by another of similar

pattern and colours; if the paint of the wainscot has faded, it has been revived with a fresh coat of the same pale shade of blue; the awkward corner cupboard, miscellaneously crammed from floor to roof, remains precisely as it was; and duly ranged on the chimney-piece are the grotesque huntsman and shepherdess, and Billy Lackaday and Patty, and the Swiss Cottage money-box—all gifts of our youth, and still held sacred to the names of my mother's children when they were little. I should not like to be the profane person to despise or displace any, the most maimed amongst them all. They are not inferior china-ware, they are memorials. And there are the shells in which, pressed close to my ear, I first heard the song of the sea, and loved its monotonous mournfulness; and there is my father's portrait as a pale, light-haired, blue-eyed boy of twelve years old, balanced by a silhouette taken when he was a man. And in the centre panel over all is a very yellow and ancient engraving of the Saviour thorn-crowned.

From babyhood to childhood, from childhood to girlhood, from girlhood to womanhood, never joy or sorrow of my life but this old parlour retains some light or some shadow of it. Distinctest

amongst the early times are Sunday Nights with the great picture Bible ; and the blindman's holiday-hours, from four o'clock of winter afternoons until tea-time, when my mother commonly sat knitting in her corner chair and I pored over a book by firelight until my eyes were almost scorched out of their sockets. My mother let us browse at large on the wholesome pasturage of English literature, and a subscription to the town-library supplied us with books of every kind and every degree without stint, children's books excepted. Very few of those—the nursery-classics apart—ever fell in my way, and I cannot regret it now. Learning-made-easy was not then the fashion, and many stumbling-blocks still encumbered the paths of knowledge ; but I think we have reaped some advantages from having our taste formed on standard models, which have proved signally useful in the exercise of our vocation since.

How do daughters of wealthy parents feel who look forward to the end of school-days as the end of work-days ? From quite young children we knew that the close of our school-days would be the opening of a self-dependent and self-helpful

life. The anticipation of this epoch never daunted me. I contemplated it much as I imagine a lad contemplates the termination of his apprenticeship, when he will be left to shape his own fate and to sink or to swim, according to what is in him. The idea of *fending* for myself was worn quite easy and familiar to my mind before the period arrived when the effort had to be made. Everybody has poor relations, have they not? Well, *we* were the poor relations ourselves; but we inherited the spirit of independence as our birth-right, and our mother gave us a fortune in a fair education, that our kinsfolk who stood better with the world than ourselves might never need to slight us as inferiors or avoid us as a drag.

There is a virtue in this keeping-up of family traditions and old appearances, though there may be many a sting and many a pinch in the doing. Not to let the children sink was my father's last wish and my mother's long endeavour. God has been very good to us, she says now, in quiet acknowledgment that her hard struggle has been successful. But I can remember once long ago hearing her remark with a serious smile that she was fortunate in having children blessed with good

health and small appetites—no trifling consideration when there were five of us to feed and times were dear. The sixth, my youngest brother, died soon after my father, and lies in the same grave. My mother recalls him still as her darling of finest promise, the best and brightest of us all, and talks of him as if she only lost him yesterday.

Why is it that mother-love lingers so long about dead children's shoes? In turning over the contents of an old relic-box with her a few days since I saw a tiny, faded pair, and she took them in her hand with a touch that was a caress, saying—"These were Freddy's shoes—the last he ever wore!" Poor little worn-out shoes, put off and done with thirty years ago!

I must make an end. I can paint no more Dutch pictures to-night, for the pale, shrouded shadow that falls on my palette and changes all its tints to mourning gray! Into the twilight fade the old familiar places and the old familiar faces all but one—the best old face of all—the good old mother's face.

"I think people die faster now-a-days than they used to do, mother."



"No, child. It is Time that quickens its pace as we advance in years. Then the former friends who were young with us drop off, and we have not the heart to make new ones. There are not many left of those I knew when your father brought me home to this house after we were married. I have outlived them nearly all. When you were a baby, I remember"—and so her voice wanders into the stories of long ago, and I listen as in a dream while the past lives again and is the present.

For a little while, a very little while, and then it vanishes into dim Shadowland and is gone.



## FROM DAY TO DAY.

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“Qu’il demeure, donc, cet inexorable ennui, ce fond de la vie humaine. Supporter et se supporter, c’est la plus sage des choses.”

EUGÉNIE DE GUÉRIN.





## I.

### TOILING AND RESTING.

**M**ONS. DE LAMARTINE, in his beautiful story of "Le Tailleur de Pierres de St Point," speaks of the music of the quarries in the picturesque words of a poet who has hearkened to it often; and there *is* a rhythmical sound in the stones, even to common ears, when the chisel and mallet are ringing on them.

Just beyond my hedge are two masons chipping cheerily, and as they chip one of them breaks forth now and again into a song with a voice like a thrush, and the echo in the stones chimes with the melody as if there were a soul of response in the gray mass that is glad to be freed. I cannot say so much for the heavy, reverberating *thud* of the carpenters' hammers driving nails into wood; that belabours the brain and jars the nerves as much as a perpetual thrum on one chord.

There must be a large share of every-day satisfaction in the lives of these skilled artisans ; more than I ever before imagined to lie in handicraft labours. They are hale and strong ; they come and go to the minute—my ancient housekeeper sets her clock by them ; they are always good-humoured among themselves, and they work in the sunny fresh air as if they liked it ; and I am inclined to think they do like it, and in a *natural* way, though the Common-place Philosopher of our generation asserts that nobody likes work except by an *acquired* taste.

And yet how fatiguing are many so-called popular amusements ! How wearisome is long-drawn social chat for courtesy's sake ! how wearisome are all things idle done with effort and against the grain ! I declare, for my part, work seems often the truest rest. After a long holiday, for instance, when you have been visiting your relations or travelling in pursuit of pleasure, what comfort, what peace, what quiet security from disturbance reign in the familiar nook where your books, your desk, your pen are at home ! In your accustomed groove how easily you run ! So many hours of daily task-work, then the straightening stretch of the body

and the elastic springing back of the mind, as of a bow unstrung, with which you turn to the change of work, which is as good as play—for some of us better than play.

If I go out for a long solitary walk without an object, my thoughts can plough over old ground and fatigue themselves as much as if they were still pondering a bit of difficult matter in working hours; but if I have an end in view—ferns, mosses, wild-flowers, a basket of vegetable mould, or a bag of silver sand—they can shake their wings quite free, and busy themselves blithely as bees amongst these lighter external interests. Again—if I rake, or weed, or hoe in my span of garden, or re-pot plants, or snip off dead leaves, or tie up straggling boughs, or rectify the mischiefs of the wind, my mind and hands both are filled, but filled in a new and healthy fashion. Here is a fresh shoot from an un-hopeful plant, there a bud of remarkable promise, which stir in me a gentle satisfaction; or here is a hole in the soft damp mould, where last night seedlings were watered, which signifies a toad, and nothing but a toad; or there is a fine fuchsia broken down, which plainly betrays the gambols of Cosy, my Cat, or of my neighbour's little dog Tip; and

though these small devastations ruffle me for the moment, I turn in-doors again altogether refreshed, enlivened, and invigorated.

Nothing rests me so much when my real day's work is done as a spell of play-work in my garden. The results achieved in its carelessly-ordered borders would be very poor, even contemptible, in the eyes of a gardener, but I should have little or no pleasure in them if they were tended and beautified by other hands than my own. I should not care to possess a garden unless I might work in it—make myself ache and make myself hot, weary, and untidy, as children delight to do. It is, in fact, the child-fancy for gardening that has stayed by me as it stays by many people long after they are old, rich, and subservient to the tyranny of their hired Adam—than which tyranny I know none more despotic.

It is not many months since I paid a visit with a friend to a great house which is built in the midst of the loveliest scenery in this lovely nook of the world. The highest cultivation has taken supreme possession of a bit of the capricious Landslip, and you come on charming surprises of lawns and flowers where you imagined only gray rock and

wild bushes. There are tropical fern-houses of glass glittering in sheltered recesses of the cliffs, and draperies of exotic plants, and dazzling masses of rich colour, and trees and shrubs from strange southern countries, all quite at home in this English Eden within sight of the sea. But suddenly, from the paradise of trimming and pruning, you enter upon a retired spot not larger than a good-sized room, where are common-flowers, and old-fashioned fragrances, and cuttings, and sticks, and seeds, mingled and tangled together in the happy confusion of a child's garden. This is the spot where the mistress of the house may do what she likes, where she may try her little experiments, and is not liable to have them improved on or made away with; this is the spot from which she extracts more real and personal enjoyment than out of whole acres of perfect gardening—lucky she who has rescued her tiny property of a dozen yards square from the encroachments of universal order, which to the eye is beautiful as a finished picture is beautiful, but to the health of mind and body hardly serviceable at all.

He was a conscientious and practical physician who warned my grave Uncle Samuel, on his con-



sulting him for that *tedium vitæ* yclept low spirits, that his best infirmary would be half an acre of garden-ground ; where he must lay by his respectable coat, his cares of the world, and his studious inclinations, and turn-to at the soil with a will ; and dig and delve, and win himself strength of nerve and energy of body by the labour of his hands and the sweat of his brow. For twenty years he followed this plain prescription, and lived and throve ; mowing his own lawn, clipping his own box-borders, pruning his own trees, growing his own vegetables, fruit, and flowers as diligently and toilsomely as if he were a labourer hired by the day. In rent and shoe-leather his garden was somewhat extravagant ; his potatoes were probably a penny a-piece, his peas a crown the quart, his strawberries dear beyond calculation ; but what of that ? Their costliness was balanced by the absence of a bill for ineffectual drugs, and by the exemption from Heaven only knows how much suffering of body and weariful, anxious depression of mind. Good old man ! How he used to drag us off three miles on sultry afternoons to his beloved hobby in the suburbs ; there to regale on his ripe currants, to breathe the sweetness of his remarkable stocks

and cabbage-roses, to admire the elegant luxuriance of his verbenas and geraniums, his fuchsias and calceolarias. And what a day of distress was it when he received notice to quit because the land was required for building purposes! He could never find another garden within walking-distance of his house, and the want of it was a constant source of lamentation. At every opportunity he betook himself to Kew or to Sydenham, and there refreshed his spirit with the sight of luckier men's labours. His was the child-garden fancy surviving into quite remote old age; and that it is a happy fancy to have, and a healthy fancy to cultivate, I must maintain.

In fact, I have a great opinion of the value of real, hard, active, interesting work—work that taxes us, and makes a rest on the ground or a draught of water genuine needs and refreshments. It is not easy to compass such work in a town, and the best substitute for it that I know is to empty a book-case, dust the books and put them up again; but that lacks the elixir vitæ of fresh air. But in country-places how cheerfully busy one may be for amusement amongst things which tend only to the refining, the calming, and the strengthening of the

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mind—things which cost pence in money, and spare pounds in pain and *ennui*! And in a beautiful country how luxuriously poor one may be, knowing nothing of the sordid taint that creeps into shallow purses in the smoky, silent back-streets of cities!

Yes, I love a simple country life; call it *dull* if you will, but to me it is never dull. Dull! when the spring is budding in garden and glen, when the harvest waves golden atop of the hill, and the sky is fuller of mystery than ever poet or painter conceived? Dull! when death is abroad on the thundering roll of the storm, when the waves rise up in their might, and the winds of the north are unloosed? *Dull!* It is variety perpetual—it is infinite change! It is Nature myriad-visaged, decked daily in new robes of state, of mourning, of homely labour. No, it is the *town* that is dull—the town ringing its monotonous round of routine in mask of brick, stone, stucco; begrimed with dusty toil, stained with tears of blood, haunted with vain sighs of hardly-striving men!

A town always gives me the sense more or less of being in prison pent, and harassed with a wild

longing to escape. Its novelties, its luxuries, its things beautiful to eye and ear are not to me sufficient compensation for its hurry, its closeness, its distracting turmoil. I can brace myself up to bear it for a week, for a fortnight even, and then, oh, how my soul sickens after the quiet, restful atmosphere of fields, and woods, and hills! *Ennui* underlies life everywhere at times, but its stronghold, from which no mental effort of mine can dislodge it, is in the town. When I have seen the new pictures and listened to one fine opera—Mozart's or Rossini's by preference—I have had enough; I am tired and want to go.

And, apart from matters purely of taste and sentiment, the country is not out of the world now as it used to be. In a few hours we can come from the remotest quarters, and be engulfed in the whirlpool where "the stony-hearted mother of millions" keeps her children, her waifs, and her strays all seething and troubling together. And the world comes out to us on daily flights of newspapers, weekly flights of reviews, and monthly flights of magazines, until we, rustivating in the wilds, know what is doing at the uttermost ends

of the earth as well as if we lived in the heart of the busiest throng. And so I thank God that He has cast my lines in pleasant country-places, where, whether toiling or resting, I need never be dull unless overtaken by sorrow.





## II.

### OUR TOAD.

**F**OR several days past Cosy has lain under the imputation of grievously disturbing the geraniums planted in a little semi-circular bed at the foot of the crimson China rose which flourishes under the veranda hard by the front-door. Every morning the soft mould, watered over night, was found strewn beyond the border of stones set to keep it in form, while a deep round hole was visible close under the wall. To fence out our privileged marauder we erected a light *chevaux de frise* of sticks all about and amongst the plants; but the next morning some of the sticks were knocked down, and the mould was scattered as before, while a second similar bed was disturbed in like manner. My ancient Dinah grumbled at Puss, set matters in order, and strengthened her barrier of sticks, but yesterday morning again ap-

peared precisely the same results ; and on stooping down to sweep the mould within its due bounds, she espied something stirring, and there, behold, was our Toad come back to his old haunts !

Our Toad ! The Rev. Gilbert White in his "Natural History of Selborne" remarks on the peculiar taste of certain ladies who took a fancy to a toad, and nourished it for many years, until fate in the guise of a raven destroyed it. We did not take a fancy to our Toad—it was he who took a fancy to us—and no matter how pointed the hints we gave him that his society was anything but welcome, he persevered in forcing it upon us, until at last we resigned ourselves to his incursions, and ended by adopting him as one of our out-door pensioners. This is now the third season he has made his ambush amongst the pots and plants under the veranda, and I will say this for him—he keeps us quite free from beetles and other insects, which before he established himself there were very numerous.

But no struggle against natural antipathy, and no argument against vulgar prejudice, have yet sufficed to place us on terms of familiarity with our Toad. We tolerate him as a useful encum-

brance, and should be sorry did any harm befall him within our ken; but we cannot love him as we love our thrushes, our robins, our cheerful little wagtails—who, by the by, have returned, or else a pair of their near kinsfolk. I made his acquaintance first in my own drawing-room, late one sultry August evening, just as he was retiring modestly beneath the fender; the doors had been left open for air, and he had availed himself of this opportunity of stealing in to seek a cool and shady retreat. By means of a long-handled brush we contrived to tilt him into a dust-pan, and then my little maid bore him shuddering away, and tossed him down the colts'-foot bank into the lane. We never expected to see him come back any more after that; but the following evening, when I was watering my plants, there was his jewel-eye gleaming out from the dark behind them! We left him there. The next night he came in at the *back-door*, and just as we were going to bed, there was he, lifting an ambitious leg to climb the stairs also! We imagined that he must have got in by Cosy's trap, for we were now very careful to close all doors at twilight; and this time Dinah ejected him very summarily with her sweeping-brush—



she scolding and he hissing and crying pitifully.

The following day I begged Kester to seek him and not to hurt him, but carry him far away covered up in a flower-pot, that he might intrude on us no more. After a brief hunt he was found under shelter of a thick bed of violets, and the old gardener took him to the top of a great field in the rear of my cottage, and dropt him tenderly over the hedge into a nice deep, damp, quiet ditch, where any toad of average discretion might have been happy. But not so he. Three days later, hankering after rose-beetles, his flesh-pots of Egypt, he returned; and then we made up our minds to leave him in peace so long as he left us in peace—that is, kept his proper place out of doors.

His last lesson from Dinah's brush had taught him manners, and he confined himself thenceforward to his quarters under the veranda, where he lived securely amongst the pots through the summer; wandering by night, as is the habit of the race; for if ever I was abroad after dark at neighbourly tea-drinking, or rural concert, or improving lecture, my home-coming lantern always

shewed me the dark, creepy-crawly movements of our Toad retreating beyond the sphere of its betraying light as I drew near the door.

When the pots were removed to be housed for the winter he had disappeared, but early in the following spring he was discovered hidden amongst the golden moss and ferns which clothed a bit of rock-work ; and soon after he returned to his post and his duty of insect-hunting under the veranda. All last summer he behaved correctly, never crossing the threshold once or in any way making himself unpleasantly obtrusive. In the autumn he vanished again, and now again he has come back—enormously grown, says Dinah ; for I have not seen him myself.

The punctilious old woman cannot even yet feel cordially or Christianly towards him. When she saw him yesterday morning, instead of bidding him welcome, she took her ruthless brush and trundled him out of the garden straightway—taking heed, as she solemnly assured me, not to injure him—and so over the bank into the lane ; but this morning his traces were again as distinct as ever, and if we were to investigate the violets, there no doubt lurks he, waiting till night comes, when

he may crawl forth to his feast. As for me, if I do not delight in him, I meekly endure him ; his importunity has tired out my repugnance, and I always garden in thick dog-skin gloves.

From these incidents in the life of our Toad it appears to me that the toad must be rather highly placed in the scale of moral and mental development. Witness his constancy, his memory, his reasoning faculty, which brought him to see in only two lessons how he might secure to himself the privileges of food and shelter on the slight conditions of not crossing our door-stone back or front. How often must Experience rap *us* on the knuckles before she succeeds in teaching us even so much of her useful practical wisdom as this? I have heard of sermons in stones and toads in stones, but never of sermons in toads ; and yet I see what an excellent moral discourse might be written with a Toad for a text, if one had patience to think it carefully out—which I on this sunny June morning have *not*.





### III.

#### RAIN IN SUMMER.

**T**HE sound of rain in Summer pattering through the thick leaves is a music that I delight to hear. We have had a thunder-storm this afternoon, but the heaviest of the shower is now over, and the air is perfumy-sweet as a newly-gathered nosegay, while the drifting apart of the clouds, which made a premature twilight, leaves us yet an hour or two of soft, dewy, purpled sunshine before night.

An occasional wet day gives me the sense of being put in possession of a little extra leisure. The few hours the rain abstracts from my out-door recreation I can devote to making-up arrears of correspondence ; or if my work-basket has a more imperative claim upon me, I set my fingers to sew, and perhaps get a bit of long-neglected, uninteresting mending off my conscience. I do not love my

needle—this was a grievous reproach to me when I was young, and I believe it will be a reproach to me as long as I live. Sorely against the grain was I initiated into the mysteries of hemming and seaming, gathering and stroking, stitching and button-holing, my patient instructress being a wee, wizened, spectacled old lady, to whom I hereby make my compliments on the thoroughness of her teaching; for steadfastly as I averted my mind from it in my indocile childhood, it sank deep, and I am now as skilful in the exercise of her art and craft as when she turned me out, “a finished needlewoman,” better than twenty years ago. It was a favourite saying of hers that there were periods in the lives of all women when plain sewing was more comforting and soothing than any other occupation to which they could betake themselves. My experience has not borne out her assertion—young, it afforded me delicious pauses of semi-leisure for day-dreaming, and now it tends always to the production of a shallow current of desultory thinking; but rest from weariness, relief from disquietude, or balm for sorrow found I in it never.

It was a dull, old-fashioned parlour where we used to sit, with one window looking out upon a

small paved court, over the wall of which drooped and dripped a tree or two. The fire-place was set diagonally and unsociably across a corner of the room, but over the chimney-piece was a picture which was as good as a whole gallery to my untired imagination. It represented the Trial-scene of the Queen in Shakspeare's Play of "King Henry VIII." There stood Katherine in the midst of the Court, with arm raised and finger pointed towards the great Cardinal, as if she were breathing forth her indignant reply to his exhortation that she would be patient, and refusing him for her judge whom she knew to be her enemy. And there sat the King, leaning his head upon his hand, and the Bishops and Scribes and Peers of England ; and behind the Queen stood her faithful Griffiths, and a group of sad, curious, fair faces, the fairest of them all being that dainty Maid's who "would not be a queen, that would she not, for all the riches under heaven ;" yet took her discrowned Mistress' place, and when time brought round its revenges, proved cruelly and in very deed how much better is it to be lowly born,

" And range with humble livers in content,  
Than to be perk'd up in a glistening grief  
And wear a golden sorrow."

History according to Shakspeare was much more to my taste than the Pinnock and Goldsmith on which we were dieted at school; and many an hour of sweet festive revelling had I in the deep, double-columns of a big Russian-bound copy at home when I ought to have been pursuing my irksome duty towards band and gusset and seam. "The Song of the Shirt" when it was new struck a most responsive chord in my bosom, and I was never weary of quoting it in pity of myself. No excuse was too minute as a means of escaping from that boring little instrument, in the use of which expertness seemed to me contemptible; and without any excuse at all my hands would drop often into my lap, and my eyes fix themselves on that suggestive picture until tears obliterated the prosaic linen, and a sharp admonition recalled me from the exquisite dream-land, where my fancy and memory together had been weaving the warp and woof of its story, to the ugly parlour, the solemn rebuke of the old lady's spectacles, and the tedium of stitch, stitch, stitch!

At the further end of the room, and almost in the dark, there was a book-case with doors glazed and locked; but if ever by a happy chance I was

left to myself for ten minutes, I would tip-toe across the faded carpet and enjoy the surreptitious treat of reading the names on the covers, until the creaking approach of a pair of slow, familiar, stuff shoes warned me back to my stool and my task in a hurry. It was but a dreary literature that behind the glass-doors, in strict keeping with its colourless surroundings ; but anything that professed to be a book had a charm for me in those days, and anything that took the guise of handicraft labour was odious. My preference and my aversion continue still ; but the preference has ripened into discrimination, and the lively active aversion has softened into a calm avoidance of all needle-work except the absolutely unavoidable.

Of the delightsomeness of Books as companions all the world is agreed. The sage hears in his ancient tomes "the articulate, audible voice of the Past ;" the student finds in them the reflection of the living present ; the busy man fit refreshment for his jaded spirits ; the idler germs for his speculations and scenery for his dreams.

And they are such patient, courteous friends ! They tease you with no captious complainings ; fatigue you with no exacting claims. If they open



a rift into a fresh region of thought, and you lay them by to follow the new light of which they have given a precious glimpse, they do not reproach you for ingratitude or neglect; if they were sentient things more likely would they rejoice that their spark was electric, cleaving into the gloom of unexpressed ideas and lighting the way for other minds to deeper utterances than lie in them.

“ Words are things, and a small drop of ink,  
Falling, like dew, upon a thought, produces  
That which makes thousands, perhaps millions, think.”

It may be but a sentence dropt by chance on the wayside that lifts the soul to a higher level and gives it a clearer range of view. Was there ever written any book so barren that no one profited by it? That it gladdened no one's solitude, lightened no one's pain, cheered no one's heaviness, but died utterly fruitless? I am more than half inclined to doubt it. It is but a week ago that in the pages of a novel I found a paragraph that helped me to a swift and sound decision after I had been wavering miserably for many days between what *seemed* kind and what *was* right. And I now return my hearty thanks to the writer who has laid it down as an incontrovertible moral law that no good can

come from one person's assuming a duty which devolves naturally upon another.

Perhaps there is more philosophy for daily practice in the pages of novels than in any other species of literature except Essays and Sermons. It is the fashion to speak of them contemptuously in some quarters, but it is still more the fashion to read them. "'How knowest thou,' may the distressed Novel-wright exclaim, 'that I, here where I sit, am the Foolishest of existing mortals; that this my Long-ear of a fictitious Biography shall not find one and another into whose still longer ears it may be the means, under Providence, of instilling somewhat?' We answer, 'None knows, none can certainly know; therefore, write on, worthy Brother, even as thou canst, even as it is given thee.'"

"It is a kind of policy in these days to prefix a fantastical title to a book which is to be sold; for as larks come down to a day-net, many vain readers will tarry and stand gazing like silly passengers at an antic picture in a painter's shop that will not look at a judicious piece." This remark of the Author of the "Anatomy of Melancholy" is quite as appropriate in our age as it was in his; *fantastical titles* abound

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and *Sensation* is all the fashion. I listened to a sensation-sermon on Eternal Punishment last Sunday which profited me nothing; to-day I have finished reading a sensation-story which has excited without satisfying me; and now here is a column or two of literary advertisements, in my newspaper that has just come in, thick with bird-lime for the unwary, and even tantalisingly suggestive to the imaginations of those who have found out how little of solid performance may lurk behind a very showy promise.

“Something to read” is ever the cry; but choice becomes more and more difficult each day amongst the cunningly-devised fables and names of no-meaning which are the rank and file of the book-sellers’ lists. What to send for new when our familiar home-circle wearies us a little is a question for serious consideration. It would seem at first sight a saving of trouble to give up one’s judgment to the guidance of professional critics, but then, “their censures are as various as their palates;” besides, I like occasionally to get a book of which I have heard nothing; to select it by its name—a process which has all the pleasing excitement of drawing for a prize in a lottery, too often with the similar

result of drawing only a disappointment. As for asking the advice of one's reading acquaintance, it is placing before them *too* cruel a temptation—they are capable of making vicarious sacrifice of *your* leisure on the shrine of some lugubrious treatise before which their *own* patience has failed and fainted *thrice!*

Indeed there are few more arduous tasks imposed on the weakness of amiable people by superior friends desirous of doing them good than the reading of heavy books which they do not care to know about. I have often lately been compelled in self-defence to grant a dispensation to my conscience and my courtesy, and when I have been asked to study any volume more bulky than a duodecimo, I have shaken my head and protested that it was of no use; I never could get through any books except such as amuse me—novels, plays, idylls, essays, and the like. I am very fond of essays and all brief bits of desultory reading; but what right has anybody to ask me to give my precious leisure to the perusal of Epics? I detest Epics. Pope's "Iliad," Voltaire's "Henriade," Rollin's "Ancient History" were nightmares of my youth, and they and all their kindred are abhorrent to me!

What weariness can exceed the weariness of a dull book that you have *promised* to read—perhaps a quarto, and in small type! Many years ago, in compliance with the wishes of a school-fellow of learned tastes, who was my guide, philosopher, and friend, I undertook to read Lavater's ponderous work on Physiognomy. It was in three big old volumes, bound in brown mottled calf, and with illustrations; and the only trace of it that lingers in my memory beyond its size, shape, and general appearance is a sentence towards the end of the final chapter, to the effect that the reader would be none the wiser for wading through the book unless he supplemented its wisdom by close observation of human nature; for that the combinations of personal qualities which go to the formation of individual character are infinite. Perhaps my labour of love ought not to be counted altogether waste, though that truth be the only residuum that remains to me after the evaporation of all the rest.

And not long since one of the best of men presented me with a small theological octavo, accompanied by a kindly earnest request that I would give my mind to its careful study. I carried the book home and abandoned myself to its perusal in

a suitable, serious temper. It consisted of dialogues between one Socraticus, a modern free-thinker, Orthodoxus, a formalist unacquainted with the vital power of Christianity, and Evangelista. That religious argument should be carried on by a partisan with two dummies of his own animation, struck me immediately as not fair play. The device provoked me and set me speculating as to whether Evangelista, who was, of course, the author's own mouth-piece, was ever tempted in the coolness of such discussion to abridge his adversaries' reasons or to suppress them altogether. Having accompanied the disputants to the end of their talk, I found myself left with a gentle bias towards Socraticus. On avowing this to the excellent person who had pressed it on my attention, with meek insinuations that it was not *quite* the sort of book that did me good, what do you think he said? He said he had had it a long while, but that he was ashamed to confess he had never read it.

Still more recently, in a moment of weakness, I yielded to an urgent request that I would read a certain selection of modern French Protestant sermons. When the volume appeared it was in large quarto, and contained about four hundred closely-

printed pages. I toiled conscientiously through them, but at such serious expense of time and patience that I registered a vow never thenceforward to read anything at anybody's desire which would occupy longer than half-an-hour, unless the proffered work chimed with my own tastes; and I have kept it.

And if it be a grievance to have a disagreeable book *lent*, is it not a grievance of equal magnitude to have a favourite book *borrowed*, detained for three months, and finally sent home to the yawning gap on your shelves with its back broken, its leaves loose, and its frontispiece missing? Perhaps it is one of those elegant pieces of table-furniture prizable chiefly for their novelty, their engravings, their beauty of coat; a Christmas gift which you like to see for its own pretty sake and the giver's; and somebody puts up a petition that you will just allow her to look at it for a few days, thanks you exuberantly for your slow assent, bears it off, and keeps it until Midsummer is come; when its gloss is gone and all the world has seen it! There are men and women who in the matter of borrowing books have no conscience. I believe the remark has been made, not without asperity,

elsewhere; I make it myself with the keenness of personal feeling recently aggrieved.

The Wise Man protested of old that there was no end to the writing of books, and the cry has been echoed and re-echoed down to our own scribbling age until Burton's prediction, that there would be "a vast Chaos and confusion of books," seems to be on the point of fulfilment. The critics groan self-pitying; "their eyes ache with reading, their fingers with turning;" able editors lift up the voice of querulous lamentation and drop exhausted upon their laborious desks. Yet still the multitude cries, "Give! give!" and still the purveyors of mental provender to the hungry continue to scatter the golden seed from which spring the fruitful crops that fill their gaping mouths. When the crowd turns away satisfied and says, "Enough!" then will the reapers cease and the critics' occupation be gone; but now, while there is corn to be winnowed and millions are to be fed, they must even do their day's work like other day-workers, without complaining overmuch if the dust blow into their eyes, or the occasional tedium of their task incline them to weariness and drowsiness. Long and loud have they bemoaned



while wielding the despotic flail, but they are not smothered in chaff yet, nor does their danger seem very imminent. Their injury and its redress follow each close on the other's heels; if they are bored or irritated it is permitted to them publicly to yawn and yell; if they have a grievance against a book they can revenge it on the spot, and the world bears them harmless. Who besides has this sweet consolation? Critics if they only knew it are a highly privileged and happy race, yet they are of all men the most peevish. Did not Erasmus say so? They lack the calm philosophy, the serene patience, the mild discretion essential to their calling; and being themselves readily provoked they tend the more to the provocation of authors—under whose tyranny they make-believe to groan. Long nourished on strong meat, they forget that babes prefer milk, and that it is, in fact, better for them. I like a draught from the simple fount myself, especially in this lazy summer weather.

Of readers there are worlds within worlds, like the sections of a Chinese puzzle, and each individual of each world has his own special taste. Good books will always find fit audience, but there is an innumerable throng to whom they are *caviare*.

Perhaps six—or sixty—critics might be counted who do not like Mr Tupper's "Proverbial Philosophy," but one hundred and five thousand common folks who are not critics have bought, and probably one-half of that number have read it. Some people cannot see anything in the "Essays of Elia," others would vote the "Causeries" of Mons. de St Bevre dull; one man swears by Tennyson as king of poets; another calls him obscure and prefers Longfellow; one woman revels in the worldly wisdom, the humour and pathos of "Vanity Fair;" another esteems it coarse, and weeps gentle floods over the trials and sorrows of the "Heir of Redclyffe." Far below all these sweep the broad current of readers who delight in the grim tragedies and queer morality of the prevalent sensation literature, who absorb the shallow lacteal streams of the penny journals, and form a fountain of honour round the names of heroes unmentionable in the hearing of ears polite. It is these diversities of opinion which are the stay and comfort of authors. "They are approved as men's fancies are inclined."

"Romola" is too hard reading for amusement even to cultivated people, and few will bring concen-

trated thought to the study of a novel. For my part, I should like to have all my history in the guise of such books as "Hypatia," "Esmond," and "Romola;" and all my science in such papers as "My Winter Garden," and "An Afternoon in a Gravel-pit." I have implicit faith in their authors' accuracy as to facts, and pictures live before my mind's eye when dry chronological statements have vanished and left no trace.

Biography is most excellent study when we have a thorough dependence on our writer. Stanley's "Life of Arnold," and Carlyle's "Life of Sterling" are perfect in their way; but there are some essays in this kind which are calculated to excite the liveliest indignation in the bosoms of their subjects—supposing always that the dead know what use is made of them when they are gone. And in autobiography lies perhaps a still greater charm, notwithstanding Rousseau's assertion that a man, "*sous le nom de sa vie fait son apologie; il se montre comme il veut être vu, mais pas du tout comme il est.*"

Amongst Travellers' Tales give me "Eothen" and its like; amongst genuine grave histories Carlyle's "French Revolution;" amongst familiar fireside books all Essayists, new and old, Singers of short staves,

and Story-tellers who chat freshly and pleasantly about the interests of every-day life. There is a volume of brief Selections from the writings of Mr Ruskin which is one of the best table-books I know—half-an-hour in its company is as revivifying to a mind jaded with little cares as a country-walk in the sunshine.

Of so-called *Serious Books* I am no general lover; rather would I avoid them. But there is one, little and precious, entitled "A Present Heaven," which is full of good words, and of words that can never be out of season; for they breathe of the holy, hopeful atmosphere in which a Christian would fain live here and hereafter. Of books written to cheer and admonish us it may commonly be predicated that they will depress and weary; and such books I dislike, as I dislike east wind and cold thaw, and for precisely the same reasons—because they influence my feelings disagreeably, and suggest, while their influence lasts, that the world is very much mismanaged, and that there is nothing in it worth living for; a frame of mind by no means to be encouraged or indulged.

Perhaps women do not enjoy these well-meant, mistaken outpourings of comfortless consolation so

much as their writers imagine—at least, they bestow on them a very qualified commendation. I have in my possession now a copy of one of the best which has been made a present of from hand to hand through more households than one, and if I keep it until it is wanted back again by its nominal owner I shall never part from it any more. On my shelves it is harmless, and there let it lie.

Of course, the subject that has a special interest for us does not tire in the study, though it be treated ever so lengthily; but in a general way I like a book that is brief, weighty in matter but light in hand, and printed in distinct type. Cheap volumes in minikin print I avoid on principle, having a respect for my eyesight. I once sat next to a gentleman at dinner who told me he had read through the “Koran”—every line of it—and also through Sir Archibald Alison’s respectable history. He pronounced them entertaining works both, and I admired his perseverance. I have heard of a matron who devotes her spare moments to the perusal of a Cookery Book and the devising of state dinners that she never gives; and I know a young lady who prefers grammar to any of the results of grammar—a taste which strikes me as analogous to a

preference for the roots of plants over flowers and foliage. Very lately I saw it asserted in a popular Review that, next to Novels, parliamentary Blue Books were of all things the heaviest reading; and yet there exist country gentlemen who quite enjoy Blue Books. Let authors take heart of grace! It is as old Burton says—himself quoting a philosopher of previous times—“That which one admires another explodes as most absurd and ridiculous,” and again—“Every man’s witty labour takes not, except the matter, subject, occasion, and some commending favourite happen to it.”

Without being supposed to plume themselves on an ignorance of which they might perhaps more reasonably feel ashamed, ordinary people ought to be suffered to admit their deficiency in certain mental powers and their disinclination to certain studies. There are so many things to be learnt that if we were to learn even an outline of them all we should never have done going to school. Such an extensive veneer of universal knowledge is laid on modern society that the only folks from whom there is a chance of a new view and a fresh idea are those who being out of the world are out of the

fashion, and wear boldly the grain of their native wood as did their fathers before them. It is always refreshing and satisfactory to listen to those who will talk of their own special subject—of their private taste, occupation, or even idleness; of their vagaries, speculations, and fancies; but the foggy generalisation on all the learning and wisdom under the sun to which more and more persons are becoming prone is infinitely wearisome.

I know I am secure of wide sympathy when I confess that my own appetite for useful information was always very easily appeased. My thoughts invariably refuse to stay at home when scientific or other puzzles are being explained to me, and though their absence is the occasion of confusion when reflected opinions are required at the end of the lecture, I cannot help it. The moment gases are introduced my wits evaporate in the loaded atmosphere, and a lethargic dulness creeps over all my senses. Such mysteries of natural philosophy as Why the kettle boils? and Why the apple falls to the ground? are quite beyond my comprehension. My reply to the former inquiry would be, Because it is set upon the fire; and to the latter, Because it is ripe; and if the inquisitive child who was so ill-

advised as to worry me with these frivolous demands were anxious to enter further into the subject, I should refer it to "Brewer's Questions." Next to knowing a thing of one's own knowledge is knowing where to learn it.

I am aware that some memories are so capacious, so orderly, so pigeon-holed for the safe-storing of every species of fact that their owners can pick out at a moment's notice any special cube of information that is called for; but though I entertain a lively respect for such mechanical memories, I never breathe quite at my ease when they are in fluent, audible exercise. No amount of now-understanding assentation stems the copious flow of erudition when the scientific sage of private life has once broken bounds, and no hypocritical pretence of thorough appreciation saves the hapless listener from one eddy of the overwhelming flood.

What an excruciating infliction, for instance, is a lecture served up cold at supper by a half wise woman who has been spending an evening at the British Institution! Her fresh intelligence, frothed up into trifle of science, becomes the centre dish of conversation, of which her guests must praise the composition and liberally partake. But while lend-



ing her their reluctant ears, they are secretly rebelling against her assumption of wisdom, suspecting her accuracy, and wishing she would talk of what she really does understand—of potting meats and preserving fruits apart from chemistry, or of excellent methods of curing neat's tongue; for the woman who regales on science has commonly a superior turn for housewifery.

The gift of distinct explanation is very rare. The genuine man of science is simple, clear, comprehensible, but his amateur mimics are bores without exception. When I can afford it, I propose to buy the English Cyclopædia—all the divisions—and then I shall have ready in defence a magazine of every description of useful information any hazy body can desire to inflict on me.

My faith in the popularity of science is very limited, though fashion has commanded it to be popular, and some ingenious epitomisers have minced it and seasoned it in a variety of ways to make it acceptable to weak digestions. People accept it as they accept anything that fashion ordains; but I cannot believe they relish it, though few venture to assert a preference for a more simple natural diet. Who dares cry out now-a-days in the

agonies of mental dyspepsia, "Hydro-this, aereo-that! geo-this, ethno-that! Let me alone! I care for none of these things; they are all weariness, vanity, and vexation to my spirit!"

Formerly people might be contemplative, leisurely, lazy, and yet save their reputations; in this age they must fuss and bustle and theorise, and seem to do whether they do to good purpose or to none. It was but the other day that I met with a moralist who had something to say against blessed *Sleep!* A serious, dry soul, who was intolerant of *Rest!* Sleep—Rest—their very names are lovely! The heavenly promise of them is sweet consolation to all aching, world-weary hearts and frames! If mankind slept better they would live better—at all events live more cheerfully, pleasantly, and contentedly. As a rule we deem too lightly of Sleep.

To improve themselves is the object for which the feebly conscientious toil without ceasing. And let them toil; but, oh! if they would only have a choice in the ways and means, and not all flock sheepishly after shrill dull dogs who *will* fold them and pen them in the most arid of pastures! It is pathetic to witness the virtuous perseverance of the

votaries of every new mania that has the slightest tincture of art or science. Natural History as developed in the culture of marine beasts in glass-cases has numbered its tens of thousands; and now the collecting of stamps, crests, and monograms, which claim a remote affinity with the History of Nations, is being pursued with touching assiduity by crowds of the busy-idle. I have seen one of these collections of crests neatly gummed into an elegant album, the owner of which had exercised a taste, ingenuity, and minuteness on the diapering of each page which would have stood her in good stead as a designer had God ordained that she should use her talent to earn her bread. How much more reasonable a satisfaction would she have found in the employment of her fanciful craft had she struck out an original line for its service instead of running in a groove after the unidea'd multitude!

The most sober-minded sections of society become curiously frivolous in their efforts to guard against frivolity; and its best-intentioned members are positively dangerous when a-mount of their hobbies. Here, for example, is "The Chemistry of Common Things," and a progressive friend who has

dwelt on its warnings until she has made herself suspicious of every crumb she eats, pleads with me affectionately—"Read it, pray read it; it is a delightful work!" But, *merci!* for the health's sake of my body I beg to avert my mind from all its painful unwholesome themes of meditation. Suffer me to absorb my peck of dirt unawares!

The daylight is all but gone and the clouds are gathering up gloomily again, while the ominous low whisperings of the wind bode another storm. Let it come!—to-morrow the flowers will be all the fresher and more fragrant for the sweet summer rain.





## SUMMER HOLIDAYS.

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“The happiness of life consists even as the day, not in isolated gleams of Light, but in a continual, gentle serenity. The heart lives its best days in this peaceful, even Light, though it be only that of the Moon or of Twilight.”

JEAN PAUL RICHTER.





## I.

### A SPRIG OF BORAGE.

**I** NEVER could see the wisdom of infusing rue into every cup we have to drink, as some persons esteem it a religious duty to do; I would rather for my part drop a sprig of borage even into the bitterest. Like rain off a duck's back, petty trials and petty woes roll off the waterproof cloak of cheerfulness. Ah! what a God's blessing it is!—in the long run, perhaps, worth as much as a fortune, worth *more*. If I had to begin the world anew and to choose my working tools, I would ask but for good health and cheerfulness—contentment and moderate prosperity follow certainly in their wake. To be satisfied with the passing day of small things, to seek out the pleasantness and picturesqueness of prosaic duties, and with a minute philosophy to study each little gift that time and nature put in our way, is to



make the best of a dull life and to enjoy it. We who must draw lots with fortune must needs draw now and then a billet that carries us quite out of our element ; but what of that ? Novelty should impart a relish even to discomfort ; necessity should take the edge off every hardship and disappointment.

With a strong taste for books and a preference for quiet, refined surroundings, my picture-book of memorials still records that I lived, thrived, and was merry in scenes altogether uncongenial. My earliest home amongst strangers was anything but what I should have selected had choice lain within my power ; but I spent two years there in very tolerable ease, and I look back upon the time now with feelings akin to gratitude.

The house stood bald and bleak enough amongst the northerly wolds ; a little space of garden surrounded it and the undulating pastures of a great farm. There were neither friends nor neighbours within miles, and of literature there was an absolute dearth. An imperfect and mildewed edition of the *Waverley Novels* alone ornamented the chiffonier in the drawing-room, and the eye of suspicion and disapproval was upon any hand that ventured to

touch the precious volumes ; for reading there was condemned as idling. Letters came but twice a week ; the world's news but once, by means of a sporting paper ; and there was a sixpenny magazine with puzzles in it for the children once a month besides, but nothing else. Work was more abundant—of that there was never any lack. Over and above the daily dues of lessons and plain sewing, with exultation and astonishment I even now recall my feats in the way of tapestry—Bolton Abbey in tent-stitch, and the entrance of our Saviour into Jerusalem with three horses and fifteen figures, must still exist somewhere—faded yet cruel trophies of my hard-spent leisure.

Call these the shadows—there were lights, and high lights, too, on many of those lingering days ; for long and lingering they not seldom were. Resting on the hillocks of the Langhill in the still evenings of May to watch the lambs run frolic races ; exploring the spring woods ; wandering over the sheep-walks of the wolds in summer ; games and dances under the holly boughs at Christmas, and a rough and ready hospitality all the year round—are these nothing to remember ? Then the hours of delicious quiet on Sundays and

holidays in my own little room, looking across a wide expanse of woody hills, where I spun scores of brief romances in rhyme and prose, all with tragical endings; for before I knew Death and Sorrow personally I never could find in my heart to make my puppets happy and homely, like the folks of my every-day life: where I translated whole scenes from the "Henriade" until the measure ran so easily there was no more excitement in it; where I addressed my first literary effort to the sixpenny magazine, and had the superlative delight of seeing it in print, and the haunting agony of dread lest anybody should find it out—but nobody did.

They were two healthy, happy years—no moping, no enforced solitude, no fantastical grievances prevailed there to spoil my courage or my temper; only a sobering, hardening discipline, that made me the fitter for the work and the burthen of the years that were to follow.

The primary duty of the sun is *not* to cast shadows, and it is just as we choose to take the world whether we see the silver lining of every cloud or always some rising cloud on the horizon of the clearest sky. Undoubtedly many things are too

hard for us unless we can leave their issues in God's hands after our own little best is done. It would be impossible for me to distrust His goodness, looking back on my dull life by the light of my experience now. His gifts of health and cheerfulness have borne half my toils and trials, and my reliance on Him has borne the rest. If I had been weighted at starting with a murmuring, restless, craving spirit I should have had to write it down often wretched instead of peaceful, sufficient—the best life the All-Wise could have allotted me. In any other I might have failed more grievously than over my own easy task ; the one temptation of which has been to stand by it sick and idle, and to scorn it now and then as a thing not worth doing. And a sore temptation it is to fall into disgust of trivial duties when they are all we have ; to dream ourselves capable of greater labours when we have not yet learnt the alphabet of obedience to the Law that rules and over-rules the world.

Nevertheless there will occur periods in the most satisfying life when the hours lag, and each day comes to its end wearily, drearily. Though we may be well in body the mind soon desponds in this

continuous, level monotony, and a very trifle will then cause it to turn and prey upon itself in a vapourish mood of discontentment.

Such a mood came lately over me, and made life for the nonce to appear threatening and dismal. Troops of shadows loomed darkly out of the future and covered me with their icy gloom. A friend had been speaking to me of a poor lady, who having worked from girlhood like myself, was now destitute, at seventy, of the common necessities of life. Helping others and others failing her, she had come to the threshold of want at last. As I listened to the piteous story a queer feeling crept over me that her fate might be on the cards for me also, and I confess at first sight the possibility daunted me. I have generally good heart to withstand discouragements, but for several days provisions of long life ending in a poverty-stricken old age filed forth from the dim vistas of the unknown and haunted me at every turn. I saw myself in imagination suffering the same perplexities as this forlorn lady; suffering them, perhaps dying under them; for at seventy one has not much fortitude to bear up against the despites of fortune.

Fears and fancies of this sort are not amenable to reason—they only yield to faith.

During the rainy twilight of a long rainy day I set myself to calculate the chances of my continuance in prosperity, and they appeared as ten to one against me ; but when I looked back with sudden impulse on the days that were past, and remembered the difficulties and dilemmas through which I had been thus far safely brought, my unbidden guests vanished in a trice !

Thought I to myself—"Seventy is a long way off, and to that distant span my years may never reach. Meanwhile I am cared for—why fret my soul with forecasting future woes, when there may be for me no future at all in this work-a-day world ? There is only one stay to which I can betake myself with confidence, but that is the surest. I must go on toiling and trusting as I have always done. God has hitherto given me strength sufficient for my day ; and if He should withdraw it, it will be for His own wise purpose—that I firmly, fully believe." And thus thinking, I was myself again.

Yes, Trust in God is the sprig of borage that is the true cure for melancholy. It lifts tired feet over the stoniest roads ; holds up feeble hands

through the dullest task; cheers lonely hearts as with the comfort of a perpetual presence; and this sprig of borage I dropped into my evening cup, while beyond the mist and rain-clouds of the on-coming night I saw, by the eye of faith, the lamps of heaven shining, as beyond the mist and rain-clouds of human sorrow shine always the tender mercies and love of God.

My mood of anxious depression, with its spectral fears and fancies, exorcised, peaceful content rolled back over my mind like a stream with a fresh on it. The next morning rose resplendent after the summer rain. Waves of fragrance breathed in at the open window, birds twittered and chirped in the dewy bushes, wild roses and honeysuckle were all a-bloom in the leafy hedges. To sit down to work seemed almost ungrateful when Nature offered me such a brilliant holiday. "Life is short," said I to myself; "it is good to enjoy it;" and with a book in my hand I wandered out of doors, and played truant from my tasks till night.

There is an old house not very far away from the village which is a favourite limit to my rambles, and I made it my limit now. It is less

than half occupied, and indeed much less than half fitted for occupation ; for in floors, wainscot, and panelled ceilings time and decay and dry-rot have made many ruinous breaches. It was a Manor House once, and may be called so still ; but its present tenants are farmers, and all the busy, rural sights and sounds of farm labour surround it with a homely pleasantness. On the south side of it lies a formal old garden with clipt shrubs of yew and arbor vitæ, and pleached alleys which look much as they must have looked a century ago. A flight of very ancient stone steps leads down from the hall into the widest of these alleys, which is bordered with gnarled fruit trees—some of them long past blossoming and bearing-time. In the shady nooks of rock-work are plants that I do not know elsewhere—dainty, tufted, cushiony things, red as gold and white as snow ; while at the lower end of the garden runs a brook, on the further side of which rises a sandstone cliff garnished with wealth of ferns in its moist crannies ; there are some exquisite vignettes down in that channel which always make me long for the artist's craft and skill. Shut up in that quaint hedged-in spot with its junipers, and oddly-pruned shrubs, and



hoary trees, and aloes, and trim walks, and borders, I can easily fancy myself back in the picturesque days of Cavaliers and Roundheads. There is to me an exceeding charm in these haunted old houses; for "all houses wherein men have lived and died are haunted houses!" And how many must have lived and died here since its mossed walls rose from their strong foundations!

My imagination repeopled the sunny garden and the dusky hall with long-vanished generations, and when they ceased to answer to its call I appealed to my book that I had brought out for company. It was a volume of Wordsworth's Poems. He was not a favourite of mine formerly; indeed, I think we must have pretty well done with the expectations and activities of life to enjoy him at all; but now I find in his pages a thousand tender touches that come home to my heart, and innumerable pleasant pictures in the woods and fields and by the common way-side to which he has opened my half-conscious eyes.

But neither did I read long; I had given my conscience an inch and it was preparing to take an ell. Dreams of other holidays in other scenes passed rosily before my fancy. Midsummer was

close at hand, and Midsummer always was the season of holidays. If Life be short and it be good to enjoy it, it is surely good to enjoy it with a wise discrimination. Variety is excellent in its way—and there is no spur for the mind like change. At home, amongst familiar things, we must seek it—abroad it comes to us unsought. *Abroad!* Why not go abroad? Why *not*?

I held a little argument all round the question with myself. The hindrances were few and easily got rid of; the inducements were many and powerful. The means and the opportunity were mine more than they had ever been yet, and more than they might ever be again. “If you neglect them you will repent it,” whispered the voice of Experience. “If you do not go now you will certainly not go at seventy,” suggested the voice of Warning. “You have worked hard through the winter and have earned a holiday,” said the voice of Conscience. “That is true,” answered I to myself; “and I will have a good one!” Which decided the question, and sent me home exultant—so exultant that in going I lost my way; the fairies best know how and why; for it was Midsummer Eve, and all about here is Fairy-Land.



## II.

### A NIGHT AT AN INN.

**T**HIS is the first night I ever spent at an Inn, and the feeling of isolation combined with perfect ease and freedom within the four walls of my room is very strange. It is bright moonlight on the sea ; there are the vessels in the harbour, and the lights, and the shingly beach, which already look as familiar as if I had known them for years ; and yet I never saw them until a few hours ago.

Time is much longer when it is filled with new and vivid impressions. It is in the monotonous routine of regular work and quiet leisure that it flies. This has always been my opinion, based on genuine experience. A summer spent quietly at home is *gone* almost before I have settled to enjoy it ; a summer broken into periods, one spent here, another there, is equivalent to two lengthy sea-

sons; and the coming back to work and rest in the golden blaze of September or the bronzed glow of October is as good as a third.

This Inn is not the road-side Inn of romance, but a vast caravansary on the great highway of nations. It is a journey to traverse its passages, a formidable ascent to mount its stairs. I asked for tea on coming in, and the pleasant-faced chambermaid invited me to go and get it in a vast saloon that I can see flaring with gas a hundred yards off across a gravelly garden gay with scarlet geraniums. A door slammed a quarter of a mile away reverberates through the whole building; if I ring my bell somebody has a five minutes' walk to answer it. Yet people live here—make of it their *home*. I could make mine in a desert sooner than in such a wilderness of bricks and mortar—more lonely than any solitude—mocked with the busy semblance of society in perpetual flights of strange faces!

There is a German band on the grass in front of the saloon playing a selection of operatic airs, and the summer night breathes soft and sweet over the water, which ripples and washes against the harbour wall with a lulling, drowsy sea music. My

window is wide open, and now and then a voice of some one talking and walking below reaches me. I have a curious sensation as if it were all but a repetition of incidents that have happened to me before—in a dream or a previous state of existence.

Is it because I am cut off from the seeing and hearing of positively familiar things that things strange assume this spectral guise of being old friends and intimates? There are bells ringing out from some church-tower in the town now, and though at the first peal their sound was harshly discordant they have softened already into thrilling echoes of other chimes, long ago silent for my ears except in remembrance.

It is Fancy—it is all Fancy that plays us these jugglers' tricks! But alone for the first time at an Inn, fancies to me are more real and tangible than facts. This morning only I left home—I wonder what Dinah is doing, and Cosy my cat? Perhaps wondering also after me. It is at least a week in sensation since I bade them good-by, and ran down the hill to catch the coach when the horn blew. My absence may be reckoned by hours, and yet I wish I could peep through a magic-glass and see if all is well. Homesick already!



### III.

#### FIRST IMPRESSIONS.

**D**O holiday-folks and folks who travel to make capital out of their little experiences record their first impressions? or do they delay until the *verve* of newness is gone off, and then colour their sketches through the medium of their own clear or cloudy idiosyncrasy?

I have a strong prejudice in favour of the general correctness of first impressions myself, and as far as in me lies I always retain them, if it be only for comparison with after-thoughts.

A high wind was blowing about Boulogne that afternoon when we landed, and an air of dryness and cleanness pervaded the streets, through which were scudding detachments of boys and girls—the boys with nose-gays, the girls clad all in white, and veiled and crowned with flowers like little brides, for the ceremonial of their confirmation or first communion.

There was an unbecoming easterly atmosphere, clear and gray, over the town, and that was perhaps the reason why the few inhabitants who were abroad besides the children gave me a notion of their being all small, lean, pinched, and sallow ; far from handsome in feature or pleasing in countenance, and with a prevailing tint of cold blue in their clothing.

Then the country between Boulogne and Amiens—a country to go mad in, I should call it! Oh, the depressing blankness of those low-lying marshes where even June can spread no beauty! Oh, the weariful monotony of those eternal rows of poplars leaning against the level horizon for leagues and leagues! It was a genuine refreshment to the mind to see here and there a quickset hedge not more than a foot above the ground, and only just budding into greenness. He must be a good Christian who has planted these thorns in his native soil. But will the bleak sea-winds ever give them leave to grow to the full maturity of beauty? Will they ever be tangled full of briony and bind-weed bells, and wild roses and honey-suckles, like the hedges of lovely lanes at home in England? I doubt it.

Amiens itself looked pleasant and reposeful in

the evening sunshine ; green with acacias drooping over garden walls, and vines coiling up the fronts of its old houses. But in the early glow of morning it was all astir. Bride-like girls and dapper little high-shouldered men in miniature, such as we had seen drifting through the streets of Boulogne, were trooping towards the Cathedral, which by eight o'clock was thronged with them. Poor schools marshalled by homely Sisters of Charity, country flocks led by work-worn parish priests, files of bright-eyed girls guarded by sedate governesses, and regiments of boys dragooned by important ushers, marched in order down the glorious nave, and took their places quietly where the church officials appointed. On the skirts of the youthful company hung a miscellaneous crowd of interested town's-folk and country-folk ; and an ancient dame from one of the marshland villages, of whom I asked a question, eagerly vouchsafed me all the information she was mistress of as to the ceremonial and the Bishop ; but especially was she glad to point out her own *pays* and her own beloved *curé*—an elderly man with a lean, anxious, sun-burnt face, and the rustiest of bombazine cassocks—very much like a gray curate amongst ourselves.



It was to me a beautiful, a holy scene. Through the solemn twilight shadows of the roof slanted broad rays of sunshine, which, falling on the gathered multitudes, raised the white mass here and there into clustered groups of angelic radiance; while the rich colours of the priests' vestments, moving distantly and indistinctly amidst the throng, brightened the sober ranks, now with a flash of splendid scarlet, then with a gleam of gorgeous purple, and again with a dusky glimmer of burnished gold, like master-touches in a sumptuous picture.

Outside the sculptured walls of the cathedral there was a strange hush and air of desertion. Lurking under its northern shadow were ancient, lofty houses, hoary with the grim age of cities; but round in its southern sunshine I caught tempting glimpses through thick summer foliage of cool green turf, of perfumy shrubs and flowers lying in the peaceful seclusions of the Bishop's Garden. All Amiens was making holiday over the renewed baptismal covenant of its children, and has left in my memory a vision suggestive of none but Christian and kindly thoughts.

Paris, I am half afraid, will, on the contrary, be always associated in my mind with small disap-

pointments, east wind, clouds of dust, blinding white sunshine, and incessant clangour of rullies laden with ponderous blocks of wrought stone or great bars of iron ringing and resounding against each other with deafening, monotonous, cruel din. In quest of the peace and quietness which are not the common attractions of Inns, my travelling-companion prematurely hired a handsome private apartment for a fortnight, and very dearly are we paying for our deceptive whistle. Velvet and gilding we have in abundance, and from our five windows we look over a formal, flowery garden, but between that and us lies a narrow street, where the traffic ceases not day nor night ; and where the echoes of the Champs Elysées and of the bustling Faubourg St Honoré swell the perpetual tumult. Building-up, pulling-down, and restoring of houses is going on within a stone's throw in every direction, and the noise and heat and reeking dust are in our ears, our eyes, our oppressed souls every day and all day long.

But Paris is a city of associations, and we cannot be dull in it though we be ever-so weary. To and fro its streets move crowds of classic ghosts, and as their old familiar haunts vanish one by one before

the fiat of imperial progress new splendours rise upon every hand. But to me, a stranger, they are not so picturesque, no, nor so *real*, as the places time has sanctified. Napoleon III. is at home in the Tuileries, but it is not of him I think looking down the long garden vistas to its gray and crumbling front; it is of the fatal Eve of St Bartholomew, of the dreadful Days of the Terror, of the glories and humiliations of that brilliant *Ancien Régime* of which the modern dynasty will leave few memories to the young generation except such as must live in history for ever.

My imagination had prefigured for me antique Paris—the Paris of Louis XIV., of Marie-Antoinette, and the whirlpool of Revolution; but in my first impressions it reappears as a city of no longer ago than yesterday, white, bright, busy, noisy, and well-ordered, where we must resuscitate the dread past to give the present interest.





#### IV.

##### ON A RELIC OF THE HÔTEL DE CLUNY.

**M**OLIERE has a monument in the Cemetery of Père la Chaise, but his jaw-bone is at the Hôtel de Cluny—so they say. I saw it this morning lying on a black velvet cushion with a glass shade over it. Where his other bones may be who can tell? After mouldering for more than a hundred years in the six feet of holy ground behind the Chapel of St Joseph in the Rue Montmartre, which the priests so sorely begrudged him, what was presumed to be his dust and the dust of La Fontaine was exhumed, and Paris verbally decreed to her illustrious sons monuments worthy of their renown. For seven years thereafter the coffins were sent from pillar to post and from post to pillar, neglected, abandoned, forgotten. Then they obtained a temporary refuge at the Musée des Petits Augustins; but it was not

until 1817 that they found a final rest under the masses of masonry which commemorate them in the crowded gardens of Père la Chaise.

I have not much faith in the identity of bones that have been disturbed; the grim-grotesque relic of the Hôtel de Cluny may be genuine or it may not, but the one sure, perpetual, and honourable monument of Molière, as of all great writers, is in his works. We look at certain volumes standing on a library shelf, which to ignorant or indifferent eyes are mere leather-bound, printed paper-substance, but which to their owners are Shakspeare, Molière, Bacon, Montaigne—so much of them as is not subject to earthly death, so much of them as lives for all time—their thoughts, their essence; the very men as they were in the spirit and in the flesh; as they were known of their neighbours, their friends, or their adversaries.

It is Rousseau who in speaking of Montaigne says that he paints himself in profile—how can we be assured that there is not some hideous wound on the side of the face that is hidden from us? In deliberate self-portraiture it may be that a man draws himself as he would have others see him rather than as he is; but in his works are perhaps

a thousand unconscious betrayals of his most intimate being for those who can interpret the cipher in which he is disguised from himself. Molière left not a single line of personal history, none of his contemporaries made notes of his sayings and doings, and yet posterity knows what manner of man he was; how adored by his comrades, how trusted by his friends, how honoured by the great, how feared by the pious hypocrites he ruthlessly exposed, and how with all his profound and perfect knowledge of the hearts of men he was as simple a dupe to the wiles of women as any he has drawn.

He had been dead two-and-thirty years before Grimarest's reminiscences of his life were published; and later biographers having no private correspondence to resort to, collected vague traditions and filled up the gaps between with their own inventions; until round his memory gathered a haze of conjectures and fables, as legends gather round the chivalrous names of ancient heroes. But modern research has discovered the few material facts of his life, and modern criticism has brought out the great poet, play-wright, and actor into a distinct and salient individuality, and shewn us the real Molière uttering behind the mask of

the player the bold sarcasms, the bitter denunciations, and the passionate confessions appropriate to his own personal character, sentiments, and sufferings.

The litigious fastidiousness with which biographers debate concerning the birthplace of famous men, though tedious, is excusable, because the main circumstances of their career hinge often on the veriest apparent trifles; otherwise it would seem matter of little moment whether Molière was born under the pillars of the Halles, as elder annalists aver, or more respectably in a corner house of the Rue St Honoré, as recent chroniclers state. His baptismal register is on the parish-books of St Eustache, and bears date July 15, 1622; his father, his mother, and his sponsors being all *bourgeois* and *bourgeoises* of that Paris whose manners Molière knew and painted so well.

Posterity, with its eyes open to the mature proofs of genius, is systematically hard on the short-sighted parents who fail to perceive and to foster its dawn in their children, and Molière's father, who was upholsterer to the king, has not escaped the severity of such criticism. The anecdote-mongers describe him as a narrow-minded man,

who did his best to discourage the talents of his son, confined him closely to the shop, and permitted him to receive instruction only in reading, writing, and arithmetic. But in the grip of shrewd intelligence these are the master-keys of all tabled knowledge, and only by a literal experience, and by habits of closest observation, could Molière ever have acquired that deeply-penetrating insight into human nature which makes his men and women as real and living to us now as they were to the Paris of his own day. In his early breeding were undoubtedly sown the seeds of many of his best successes; and how limited soever his father's views of education, Molière spent five years at the Jesuit College of Clermont studying philosophy under Gassendi, and perhaps learning thus prematurely to loathe the shameful sophistries he afterwards branded for ever in the person of Tartuffe.

He was twenty-two when, after an interlude of law-studies at Orleans, he betook himself to the stage, and having collected a troop of supporters about him, travelled through the provinces—leader of a company of strolling-players whose traces appear obscurely here and there during a term of fourteen years; until, under the auspices of the



Duke of Orleans and the Prince of Conti, he came to Paris and was commanded to play before the Court.

Molière's life had been hitherto divided between the trials of art and the caprices of love, but from the date of his first appearance before the Court his destiny was assured. Thenceforward he had Paris for patron and Louis XIV. for protector. His good fortune matured his genius. Having long felt his way he now found it; and in "*Les Précieuses Ridicules*" he ceased from reproducing conventional types of humanity, and painted men and women as he saw them living before his eyes. By and by there grew up between the King and the Player a tacit association which emboldened Molière to dare everything and guaranteed him against the resentments he might provoke, on the sole condition of his always respecting and amusing his ally. And the guarantee was needed, for the resentments he provoked were many. In opening wide his hand full of truths Molière drew upon himself the malice of whole classes and orders of men—the anathemas of Jesuits and Jansenists, the indignation of the faculty, the rage of the young nobles, the abuse of pedants, and the spite of

prudes. But still it will not do to rank him amongst the original thinkers who have suffered persecution for their work's sake. The King was his firm friend, and no man ever held a more straightforward public course, or was less shaken in it; but in his private life he did not escape those misfortunes of meaner men which he has so humorously depicted.

At the age of forty he married a bride of seventeen, Armande Grésinde Béjart, who, as an actress, was charming, full of grace and talent; but who, as a coquettish wife, was Molière's misery and despair. The portrait we have of her is sadly deficient in attraction, but it was touched in by the caustic pen of a woman, which perhaps explains it. "She had a very large mouth, very little eyes, and a very meagre person," says Mdlle. Poisson; but these capital sins against feminine beauty did not release her infatuated husband from the spell of her treacherous fascinations.

There is a scene in "*Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme*," where it would seem that Molière alludes to these very traits in his wife, but it is only to shew their converse. Cleonte, the lover of the piece, being jealous of his mistress, bids his servant

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sustain his indignation against her by a recital of her defects; and Covielle, after a general depreciatory preface, begins the catalogue by saying, "Premièrement, elle a les yeux petits." Cleonte replies, "Cela est vrai, elle a les yeux petits, mais elle les a pleins de feu—les plus brillants, les plus perçants du monde, les plus touchants qu'on puisse voir." Covielle continues, "Elle a la bouche grande." To this answers his master, "Oui; mais on y voit des graces qu'on ne voit point aux autres bouches; et cette bouche, en la voyant, inspire des désirs, est la plus attrayante, la plus amoureuse du monde." Covielle then objects, "Pour sa taille, elle n'est pas grande." Cleonte admits it, but maintains, "Elle est aisée et bien prise." The valet adds that she is careless in speech and in conduct, that she is not witty, or clever, or gay, and that she is the most capricious woman in the world; the lover agrees with him that she is capricious, but protests that all her ways are engaging, that she has the most delicate humour, the most charming conversation—in fact, that "Tout sied bien aux belles—on souffre tout des belles." "*La raison n'est pas ce qui règle l'amour,*" says Molière by the lips of his *Misanthrope*, and in his own conduct he proved it. He continued to love his wife long after he was con-

vinced of her worthlessness. His philosophy failed him, and his firmest resolves melted away in her presence; her first words of denial overcame his suspicions, and brought him to his knees, craving pardon for his credulity. *Don Gracie* was not more jealous than he, and *George Dandin* was not more deceived.

His perfect knowledge of men's hearts served to shew him the weakness of his own, but helped him not one whit towards the subduing of it. Until his day love had always been represented on the stage as an heroic virtue, but he paints it as the infirmity of a noble mind. The confession he made to his friend Chapelle in the garden of his house at Anteuil is thus reproduced in one of the *Misanthrope's* most passionate reproaches to his cold-hearted and insincere mistress :—

“ Morbleu ! faut-il que je vous aime !  
Ah ! que si de vos mains je rattrape mon cœur,  
Je bénirai le ciel de ce rare bonheur !  
Je ne le cèle pas, je fait tout mon possible  
À rompre de ce cœur l'attachement terrible ;  
Mais mes plus grands efforts n'ont rien fait jusqu'ici,  
Et c'est pour mes péchés que je vous aime ainsi.”

And again he records by the mouth of *Alceste* the same reasons for loving as he avowed to *Chapelle* :—

“ Je confesse mon foible ; elle a l’art de me plaire :  
 J’ai beau voir ses défauts, et j’ai beau l’en blamer,  
 En dépit qu’on en ait, elle se fait aimer ;  
 La grâce est la plus forte.”

Molière makes his Célimène urge that she cannot renounce the world before she grows old ; that at twenty solitude terrifies her ; that her soul is not equal to great sacrifices ; and to Chapelle he pleads, in his wife’s excuse, that as he finds it impossible to vanquish the passion he feels for her, so it may be equally impossible for her to control her coquetish propensities ; and thereupon he pities instead of blaming her. “ *N’est ce pas là le dernier point de la folie ?*”

It was in the second year of his conjugal purgatory that Molière produced the three first acts of “Tartuffe.” The piece was well received by the Court, but it created so much scandal out of doors that the same men who had obtained the condemnation of Pascal’s “Provincial Letters” four years before, prevailed upon the King, though he had himself applauded it, to forbid its public representation ; and it was not until three years later that, slightly disguised as “L’Imposteur,” it was played before a general audience. The King was then absent with the army in Flanders, and Lamoignon,

the chief president in parliament, ordered it to be withdrawn. Molière was obliged to obey, but he sent an appeal to the King, who ultimately confirmed the suspension; for while the player's petition was on its way, the Archbishop of Paris, Harlay de Champvallon, whom Fénelon has characterised as "corrupt, scandalous, incorrigible, false, malicious, artful, enemy to all virtue," published a decree forbidding any person "to see represented, to read, or hear recited, the comedy newly named 'L'Imposteur,' whether publicly or privately, under pain of excommunication." What passed between Molière and the King thereafter is but imperfectly known; two full years elapsed before the interdict was removed, and it was not until 1669, while all Paris was rejoicing over the conclusion of the long schism which had divided the two great parties in the Church, that "Tartuffe" was finally set at liberty.

Bourdaloue, in his "Sermon sur l'Hypocrisie," and Bossuet in his "Lettre sur les Spectacles," launched against this famous Comedy their severest anathemas; but Molière might have pleaded for his "Tartuffe" what has been pleaded by a writer of our own time lying under similar condemnation, that "to pluck the mask from the face of the pharisee is

not to lift an impious hand to the Crown of Thorns." Fénelon openly supported the piece, applauding Molière's courage in having unmasked one of the vices most dangerous to true piety; and St Evremond saw in "Tartuffe" not only a masterpiece in literature, but a work destined to convert the incredulous. Writing to a friend, he says, "Si je me sauve, je lui devrait mon salut; la dévotion est si raisonnable dans la bouche de Cléante, qu'elle me fait renoncer à toute ma philosophie."

In the midst of so many differing opinions, the public has always approved and admired the play. Forty-four successive representations assured its triumph when it was first permitted to Paris to enjoy it; and down to the present day, whenever religion has been brought to bear on affairs of state, or any attempt has been made to infringe on liberty of conscience, "Tartuffe" has always been played as a living and piquant protest against such interference.

Great writers are often credited with moral designs to which they could perhaps lay but little actual claim. It is most probable that Molière neither sought to make a defence of the faith nor an attack upon it, but simply to expose and degrade a too

fashionable and successful vice. Other plays, much more grossly offending against heaven and true religion, passed uncondemned, while "*Tartuffe*," which only rent off the cloak of pious hypocrisy, raised pretenders of every caste—and doubtless some genuine professors amongst them—against Molière and his Comedy. His arrows of sarcasm overshot the mark, and wounded where they were never meant to strike. Some gentle souls bled, and some brazen mockers rejoiced at his raillery; but if the Truth *could* be brought in danger of destruction, it would perhaps risk more from the loathsome canker of hypocrisy than from the jocund or savage attacks of all the freethinkers who ever blindly fought against God.

Molière was an unflinching foe to false seemings, and everywhere the dauntless champion of the cause of good sense. Many of our modern vagaries are but the fooleries and fashions of history come round on the wheel to us; to be met with precisely the same sarcasm and the same arguments as he puts into the mouth of Chrysale and of certain others amongst his characters. In "*Les Femmes Savantes*" are all the good old standard sentiments about women which ring so sharply in



the social essays of popular reviews ; sentiments which have been echoed from generation to generation amongst men of the world without the slightest tincture of change.

“ Tout esprit n'est pas composé d'une étoffe  
Qui se trouve taillée à faire un philosophe,”

says Henriette, the natural young woman, pleading against the celibate arguments of Armande, a coquettish *Femme Savante*. Martine, the ungrammatical cook, whose learned and critical mistresses are driving her out of their service for her offences against the rules of Vaugelas, protests,

“ Quand on se fait entendre, on parle toujours bien ;”

and Chrysale, her master, supports her :—

“ Qu'importe qu'elle manque aux lois de Vaugelas,  
Pourvu qu'à la cuisine elle ne manque pas ?  
J'aime bien mieux, pour moi, qu'en épluchant ses herbes  
Elle accommode mal les noms avec les verbes,  
Et redise cent fois un bas ou méchant mot,  
Que de brûler ma viande ou saler trop mon pot.  
Je vis de bonne soupe, et non de beau langage.  
Vaugelas n'apprend point à bien faire un potage ;  
Et Malherbe et Balzac, si savants en beaux mots,  
En cuisine peut-être auraient été des sots.”

To his sister Bélise, who shudders at a solecism in words, yet herself commits the strangest solecisms in conduct, *le bon bourgeois* advises the burning of all her books except one big Plutarch

to put his bands in ; and then he recites, after the manner of his forefathers, the essential virtues of her sex :—

“ Former aux bonnes mœurs l’esprit de ses enfants,  
Faire aller son ménage, avoir l’œil sur les gens,  
Et régler la dépense avec économie,  
Doit être son étude et sa philosophie.”

Gathering force as he goes on, Chrysale complains vehemently that in his house they know everything but what they ought to know :—

“ On y sait comme vont lune, étoile polaire,  
Vénus, Saturne, et Mars, dont je n’ai point affaire ;  
Et, dans ce vain savoir qu’on va chercher si loin,  
On ne sait comme va mon pot, dont j’ai besoin. . . .  
Raisonner est l’emploi de toute ma maison,  
Et le raisonnement en bannit la raison ! ”

It must have been somewhat consoling to Philamante, his learned wife, to reflect that if Chrysale spoke wisely he was liable to act foolishly, from his want of will and his inherent weakness of character, which are so comically revealed in the last act of the play. But she herself is the original woman’s-rights-woman, eager to avenge the wrongs of her sex and to found a female academy on Plato’s model. To imbue her daughter Henriette with a higher degree of intelligence than she possesses, she would marry her to Trissotin, the poet

and pedant of the piece ; but Henriette declines to second her intentions, and giving utterance to the feelings of the great majority of young women, the damsel says—

“ C’est prendre un soin pour moi qui n’est pas nécessaire :  
 Les doctes entretiens ne sont point mon affaire ;  
 J’aime à vivre aisément ; et, dans tout ce qu’on dit,  
 Il faut se trop peiner pour avoir de l’esprit ;  
 C’est une ambition que je n’ai point en tête.  
 Je me trouve fort bien, ma mère, d’être bête ;  
 Et j’aime mieux n’avoir que de communs propos,  
 Que de me tourmenter pour dire de beaux mots.”

Martine, that grotesque of servants, when Philamante would over-crow Chrysale in this matter of their daughter’s marriage, quotes in her master’s aid the old proverb of Jean de Meung—

“ C’est chose qui moult me déplaist  
 Quand poule parle et coq se taist,”

and remarks how ridiculous is the man whose wife rules him, declaring that for her part she should find it quite just, had she a spouse, did he box her ears if she grew too loud ; and then, with a delicious feminine inconsequence and self-contradiction, she draws Chrysale’s very picture as the model husband:—

“ Les savants ne sont bons que pour prêcher en chaise ;  
 Et, pour mon mari, moi, mille fois je l’ai dit,  
 Je ne voudrais jamais prendre un homme d’esprit.”

L'esprit n'est point du tout ce qu'il faut en ménage.  
Les livres cadrent mal avec le mariage ;  
Et je veux, si jamais on engage ma foi,  
Un mari qui n'ait point d'autre livre que moi,  
Qui ne sache A ni B, n'en déplaie à madame,  
Et ne soit, en un mot, docteur que pour sa femme."

This Comedy of "Les Femmes Savantes," which appeared in 1672, was one of Molière's greatest and latest triumphs, and the Academy offered him thereupon its first vacant chair. His "Malade Imaginaire" was written during the ensuing months, and was acted in Paris on the 10th of February 1673. Though extremely ill at the time, Molière, against the remonstrances of his friends, insisted on playing the *rôle* of Argan himself; but at the fourth representation he was struck for death, and being carried to his house, he demanded the comforts of religion. All the world knows the sequel. Now was the opportunity for Tartuffe's revenge. The dying man sent successively to two priests of the parish of St Eustache, who both refused to attend him, and when a third arrived it was too late. Two Sisters of Charity, who enjoyed the hospitality of Molière's house every year when they came to Paris to gather alms during Lent, received the great player's last sigh.

The Curé of St Eustache refused to Molière Christian burial; but against this extreme severity his widow appealed to the Archbishop of Paris and to the King; pleading that although the last sacraments had been denied to her husband he had desired them, that he had received the communion the previous Easter from the priest of the Church of St Germain, and that he had died in the faith and with the feelings of a good Christian. The King intimated to the prelate that the Curé's refusal must be rescinded, and thereupon the Archbishop caused inquiry to be made into the truth of the widow's statement. The inquiry resulted in a permission to the Curé to bury the body of Molière in the graveyard of the parish, but without pomp and after dark, attended by two priests only, and without any solemn service either in the Church of St Eustache or elsewhere.

Grimarest, the most pictorially imaginative as well as the best informed of Molière's early biographers, relates that during the day before his burial an incredible multitude of people collected round his house. His widow, uncertain of their intentions, was terrified; but being advised to throw a hundred pistoles amongst the crowd, she

did so,—imploing them in the most touching terms to give her husband their prayers ; and not one amongst the throng but prayed God for him with the whole heart. The funeral took place the same night according to the Archbishop's commands,—two priests silently preceding the coffin, and a vast concourse of friends following, bearing each a torch in the hand.

Thus died and was buried Jean-Baptiste Poquelin de Molière, whom Boileau pronounced the greatest writer of Louis the Fourteenth's long and splendid reign. Posterity has confirmed the verdict, and our nineteenth century, in its paradoxical fashion of shewing honour to the famous dead, has made a Relic of his jawbone, and displays it amongst other curiosities at the old Hôtel de Cluny.





## V.

### A FRENCH INTERIOR.

**ONCE** only in my life have I been in the London studio of an English artist of distinction. It was on the first floor, back of a dull street in Bloomsbury; a confined place and not at all picturesque, with an ordinary sash-window, darkened as to the lower panes by means of a green baize curtain. A lay-figure, with her head very much on one side, occupied a temporary dais, constructed apparently of packing-cases, and lent herself uncomplainingly to the office of wardrobe woman, all the spare draperies of her owner being hung across her shoulders and extended arms. There were pictures of a murky character as furniture on the walls, and two splendid bits of fruit-colouring newly finished set up in the best light for their display; and on the easel there was a scene which fascinated me like a chap-

ter from the Waverley Novels, representing an Alchemist in his Laboratory, with the painter himself as alchemist at work on his own beard.

It was one of the most delightful afternoons I ever spent. With the audacious presumption of youth, I begged to stay in the studio with the artist instead of making one in the drawing-room coterie, where I knew grown-up interests, and especially wedding-garments, would be discussed; and leave being graciously accorded, there I remained until tea-time, hearing, seeing, wondering, and admiring, and feeling more honoured and happy than I can express. My mind had a strong tincture of hero-worship in those days. I believed artists and authors to be a distinct, ineffable order amongst men whom it was worth pilgrimages to behold, and I was not disappointed in my initiatory experience of the race.

Heaven had given my artist genius, and Fortune had decreed to him success; it was not come *then*, but it has overtaken him *since* with bags of gold, and he paints no longer in the dingy little Bloomsbury studio; but I could not help recalling its every feature yesterday, when I was ushered up many flights of stairs to a housetop in the Rue de



Laval, where was a French artist's *atelier* of magnificent proportions, garnished with all the pictorial properties which one imagines to be right and fitting in such a place,—old armour, tapestry, antique carvings, sombre draperies, cabinets of curious workmanship, oak chairs with formal, elaborate backs, Aubusson carpets, a very throne of crimson velvet and gilding on the ample dais, and a high, spacious north-light window with a luxuriously-cushioned smoking divan below it.

It was in the evening after dinner, and through a tiny lattice of richly-stained glass which stood open in a remote nook of the *atelier*, streamed rays of sunset, which ruddily suffused the whole picture—for it was a picture. There was the painter himself toying delicately with a cigar, and imagining the drowsy indulgence which courtesy denied him amongst guests; there was his graceful, languid West-Indian wife, with soft brown eyes, crisped hair, and warm complexion; there were two beautiful children—one a dusky copy of her mother; the other with great limpid, hazel eyes, a skin like cream tinted with rose-leaves, and loose waves of bright hair floating down her back; there was a brilliant cosmopolitan lady, whose

shining raiment was not more changeful than her witty, sparkling talk ; there was a quaint, original figure all in black—contemplative, grave, and indolent ; and there was myself—a speck of neutral in a cosy corner of the red divan.

We stayed there until the sunset faded and invisible shadows draperied the high walls ; and when the acacias in the garden below shewed dim and gray through the stirless twilight, we went down to the salon—the inevitable French salon, with its luxury of velvet and splendour of gold, its white panels, its slippery inlaid floor, its mirrors, and its cold formality. The *salle-à-manger* was as home-like with its dark wainscot, its oak furniture, and its pleasant windows opening on the garden as any English parlour ; but this stately salon had altogether a company air. It seemed only right that conversation should take a more measured tone than it had done in the buoyant atmosphere atop of the house ; that a card-table should be drawn out, and that a game of whist should ensue.

Cards and chess were never much in my way, and I was well pleased to look on at the leisurely game, which was without any excitement beyond

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the rivalry of skill, and admitted now and then of passing conversation. The cosmopolitan lady was a stanch royalist—only mention the present wearer of the purple and her eyes glittered with feline malice and her little nose *à la Roxalane* curled with ineffable scorn. “Why do the Buonapartes wear the Bee as their insignia?” I asked her in simple ignorance. “*Parce qu’ils sont chevaliers d’industrie;*” replied she, and dealt the cards with a spurn of contempt as if each bore the obnoxious name. The ex-Queen of Naples was her heroine of the hour. Tidings had but just come to Paris of Cavour’s death, and she opined that could the Emperor be seen in his privacy reading the news he would be discovered rejoicing with Mephistophelian joy over the opportune removal of his ally.

There exists a photograph, taken possibly at a moment unawares, in which this most astute and taciturn of rulers bears the very face of the traditional evil genius of Faust. He is leaning forward, his right hand resting on his knee, looking upwards from under his brows as at some confederate on whom he has stolen a march, and whom he is rallying with a pleasant irony. The

little *carte-de-visite* is more suggestive of the character of this man (whom one would pronounce successful were we not warned from that verdict until the seal is set upon a finished life) than any consciously elaborate portrait of him that I have seen. There are certain acts of his rise and of his power that are the warrant for this countenance of subtle, triumphant craft which the sun has surprised; and allowing Mr Hawthorne's theory of the invincible fidelity of that artist to be just, this is Napoleon the Third's best likeness.

Not a single expression of attachment to his person have we heard in Paris—not any expression of feeling at all indeed. Being one morning in the gardens at St Cloud, we asked when he was expected there, and were met with the answer that his movements were never made known beforehand even to his household. “Il ne dit jamais rien.” After pausing on that word an instant, the old soldier who acted as our guide added, “Mais l'Impératrice est bonne—elle est bien bonne et bien aimée.”

Poor lady, the weight of a crown has tamed her high spirits! Does her head ever ache under its burden, I wonder, or her heart weary and sicken

in the midst of the gaudy splendours and ominous dark shadows thronging the steps of a throne to which she was not born? Shall any of her enviers live to cry—

“Oh, God’s will! Much better she ne’er had known pomp!”

Some old-fashioned, conservative folks beholding her from afar off, and recollecting how a caprice of Fortune lifted her from the condition of simple gentlewoman to the imperial dignity, marvel how well she queens it, and yet esteem her something much less than a queen, though all that is chivalrous or picturesque in the present order of things rallies around her name. A great comedy is this Court of France, and a great audience is the People of France, but the actors and actresses appear as if hired by their favour for a term, and liable to discharge like other hirelings at the first murmur of popular discontent. Many scenes of martial glory has the stage-manager contrived for their amusement, and their jubilations have they shouted heaven-high; many substantial good things also has he given to their beloved city of Paris, and many helps to their advancement in cautious grooves of his own delving; but he has muzzled them and hoodwinked them, and said

they shall not cavil, nor hiss, nor peep, nor pry at any of the secrets of his stage-craft; and some breathe so uneasily under the irksome restraint that it is possible they may by and by ripen into readiness to run all risks for more air and more light if he pay not swift heed to their gaspings.

Success after all is not greatness. This clever ruler neither attaches the heart nor impresses the imagination of his people. They found him the ablest and strongest hand in righting the machinery of a disjointed time, and they endure that he shall serve a turn; but so far as his dynasty rests on their *love* or even on their admiration it rests on shifting sand.

In one of the galleries at Versailles there is a portrait of Napoleon the First as a beautiful boy and another as a young soldier of the Republic; elsewhere I have seen him represented in his imperial robes at the height of his fortunes, and again, signing the Act of his Abdication in their decline; and from first to last there is set on his countenance the stamp of that marvellous power which marked him a King amongst men from his youth. It is not hard to understand the enthusi-

astic devotion of his soldiers, the wild worship of Paris, and the superstitious traditions that still commemorate his name in remote country places; for a name to love and to fear was the name of Napoleon the Great, and let his ambition—that sin by which the angels fell—have been ever so dangerous or his crimes ever so many, he will go down to future ages amongst the heroes—the Alexanders and Cæsars of history.

When we look well into the lines of that splendid face, and then turn to the hard mask and dull tarnished eyes of the Emperor that is, we feel how by charm of nature the one ruled despotic as Jove, shewing like a god to his subjects through the magnifying mists of their proud adoration; and why the other is taken simply on his measure as a man—divested of his panoply of state, reduced from his stilts and shorn of his crown; and why, toiling hard in their service as the first, and perhaps to the best of his abilities according to his lights, so few amongst those who call him master are ready to cry, God bless him!

Princes are little to be envied in their best estate, but when they hold not the sceptre secure in their people's love they are sheer naught. Na-

oleon the Third is the most talked-of man in Europe, and perhaps the man whose fate and whose fame are least of all to be desired.

In a retired part of the gardens at St Cloud where the acacias were in full blossom we were shewn his son's scientific play-ground—his thatched hut, toy-railway, and miniature machines of war and peace; and elsewhere we were told how the Empress had piously bespoken for her baby the favour of Heaven by making a vow to the Virgin before his birth, and by dedicating the splendid gift which Paris presented to her on that event to the foundation of a home for orphaned children. They say he is a sturdy little manikin, with martial tastes already—unless he die young, he will hardly die without filling a chapter in History. Please God, he fill it peacefully and well!







## VI.

### AT THE MAISON ROUGE.

**I**N olden times pious Christians set forth on pilgrimage for their souls' health ; conspicuous sinners did the same for penance. How, long long ago, a king's son, for his sacrilegious love, went barefoot over all the weary leagues from England to Jerusalem ; how he watched, fasted, prayed ; how he came not into warm bath or soft bed ; how steel trimmed never his hair or his nails ; how he rested no second night in one place ; how he ate neither flesh nor drank wine, nor stayed his foot on the threshold of any church, the ancient chroniclers have recorded ; and also how he came home no more, but died on the way, and was buried for the love of Christ by some other pilgrim redeeming his sins in the like squalid fashion—in earnest faith and expectation that God would regard it consider, and forgive.

I confess that what is derided often as the superstitious folly of mediæval days seems to me most pathetic, most touching. Think of Sweyn's wild, warlike youth; then think of him putting off all that distinguished him as prince and hero, and donning the poor weeds that mated him with the meanest of men. On his heavy journey there must have befallen him such painful days as this—days of torrid heat, of parching, blighting wind, of pungent fine dust for air. If he came by Flanders, he may have passed this very way; have halted, gasping, in the treeless plains through which the Express whirled us this morning, this noon, this afternoon, until evening drew in and ended the nine quite purgatorial hours.

They are over now—the fatigue is over, the soil of them washed off; to-morrow they will be forgotten, will seem as far away as if they belonged to last year's minor miseries. All the world, and pilgrims for pleasure especially, should cultivate short memories for transient ills. How agreeable it is to lounge at this open window; to look out on the thronged market-place of Strasbourg, where the town's-folk and country-folk are celebrating their summer feast. The clamour is a long way below.

I am not in the roof, but I must be close under the eaves—on a level with the swallows; and I ought to esteem myself lucky to have won into even this quaint, queer shelter, for the old Inn is as full of guests, as busy and buzzing as a hive of bees.

It shewed very shadily and pleasantly to our jaded eyes at coming in. The oleanders and orange-trees in olive-wood tubs, that make a miniature avenue of the hospitable court, dismissed my despondent sensations at the first glance. They were so cool, so green, so perfumy, so fresh. The world was no more all stifling dust, hot-iron-smell and brazen sun. Here was gloom, here was sprinkled water on the pavement, here was the soothing immediate prospect of rest and refreshment. It seemed almost worth while to have endured the past pain for the sake of experiencing the present relief.

Did the guardian of the keys think we had quarrelled when we asked for two rooms, that he sent my companion under escort up one wide stair, and conveyed me up another to this remote nook of the ancient caravansary? I am rather glad. I don't want to go out. I don't want to talk. I only want to sit here idly, and listen to the voices

and the music rising from the crowd ; to gaze at the many-eyed walls and high-piled roofs that enclose the Place ; to speculate lazily on the strange scene that looks and sounds so merry and so gay. I like to watch a crowd, but I hate to be in it.

This is "La Maison Rouge." What ought we to know about the Maison Rouge? Does not some romance hang by its name? Some tale of Maurice de Saxe? I cannot remember—Maurice de Saxe and Adrienne le Couvreur? *He* lies here in Strasbourg, in the Lutheran Church of St Thomas. No saint, the great marshal, but a very picturesque and gallant figure in history. And Adrienne? A brilliant actress, a beautiful, impassioned woman, beloved by the first soldier of her period, lamented by the first poet. Denied Christian sepulture ; buried by night, with the least scandal possible, in a deserted wood-yard of the Faubourg St Germain, at Paris—one faithful friend present to witness, and two hired porters to hide her clay—"a woman who charmed the world, and was punished for it."

The faithful friend, years and years after that dismal furtive hour when he covered her face out of his sight, found an old letter of hers amongst his

mother's papers. "He was," she says, "the **most** respectful child, the most upright soul she had **ever** known in her life. Let not his mother fear for her young son—*she* will not draw him aside from his duty. Let him serve his country, let him delight his friends. She pities him, would not have him exiled, would not have him tormented in so many ways by her, and because of her. She will never see him again—only let him not be banished to the world's end. If he is any more persecuted, she may even for pity be tempted to love him."

She never was tempted. Maurice de Saxe had her heart. "I have not forgotten your poor in my will, monsieur l'abbé," said she to a priest who visited her dying—and then, "Voilà mon univers, mon espoir, et mes dieux!" What was there standing by the portrait of her lover? "*Mes dieux*," she said, and Maurice was but *one*. A crucifix? Perhaps so—and the glazing eyes on both as the curtain dropt.

What a long, soft, golden evening this is; how drowsy and pleasant! The music goes on, the moon floats through the pale ether over the great gray chimney-stacks opposite, and candles are

winking out here and there in the sky-high windows above the Place. Shall I have a light too? No—when I can see no more I shall betake myself to that very hard white pallet in the corner, where I shall sleep without rocking; and be up at dawn to see the streets, and the great church with the fret-work spire, and the astronomical clock the guide-book talks about—a very ancient church, finished in 1318. How many years is that ago! How much world's history has been done and undone since then!





## VII.

### ON A BASKET OF STRAWBERRIES.

**I** THOUGHT you would not get through your holiday without buying a basket," said my companion, darting an amused glance at a neat wicker-work receptacle that I had just brought in from the fruit-market, full of fresh, delicious Alpine strawberries. The basket had a lid, and the contents were invisible, or perhaps the fragrant, ruby luxury within might have stayed the observation. "There are some women who cannot make a journey without a basket—I had a suspicion you were one of that kind," added my friend.

"It is strawberries," rejoined I, with meek deprecation; "*cool* on the road to Heidelberg." My little sin against the proprieties was condoned for their sweet sake, but I felt convicted of a common taste.

How could she tell that I was a person sure to buy a basket earlier or later in our travels? I do buy baskets—I like baskets whether I have anything to put in them or not. If a gipsy comes to the door at home with white willow ware, I am sure to fall into temptation to something at half-a-crown. “Baskets, baskets, we may sell baskets ourselves enow;” murmurs Dinah, and looks disparagingly at whatever she sees I am inclined to appreciate.

All the world, I take it, buys baskets in one shape or another—baskets or whistles—and, of course, long before our day in the fair is over, we begin to think we have paid for them far too dear. There they are on our hands, however, a dusty incumbrance. Yet let us not be too ungrateful—the whistle pleased while it was new; we ate strawberries out of the basket. If the shrill pipe makes our old ears ache, or the emptiness of the place where fruit once was suggests the ephemeral nature of delightful things, let us try to remember when the one discoursed sweet music, and the other refreshed parched and thirsty lips. I have a tenderness even for my broken, disused baskets.

If it were not such a glorious, golden day, I



should now inevitably grow moral and didactic. But this serene summer splendour melts one's ethical philosophy into lazy indulgence for everybody's weaknesses and follies—our own not excepted.

And after all, what is the profit of ethical philosophy written in a book? We don't realize it there; we learn it—if we ever learn it at all—from that page of experience which each day turns solemnly over before us, and will never, never turn back again; from that page which brings its moral along with its lesson, freshly set by God for each one of us in every chapter of our separate lives.

END OF VOL. I

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